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A STRANGE GIRL.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.



FRAMED IN THE SNOW WAS A HUMAN FACE—THE FACE OF A YOUNG GIRL.

A Strange Girl;

A NEW ENGLAND LOVE STORY.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

CHAPTER I.

"LET ME DIE!"

A BITTERLY cold evening in the month of December, the year 1870.

A driving snow-storm accompanied by a north-east gale had set in early in the morning, and at the time of which we write—seven in the evening—full eight inches of snow covered in the streets and house-tops of the city of Boston.

The night was dark as pitch; the lighted gas flaring from the street lamps, seemed only to "make the darkness visible."

Few pedestrians were in the streets. Already the shops had begun to put up their shutters, and the good folks, snugly housed, and circling round their fires, began to speculate about the prospects for a hard winter.

Through the drifted snow, piled here and there in great heaps, in Causeway street, came a short, stoutly-built woman, all muffled up, and carrying a large basket on her arm. A little yellow dog, with sharp ears and a stumpy tail, carried straight up over his back, followed the woman.

Stumbling through the snow-drifts and resolutely facing the biting blast, that howled and raged around her as if to pluck the cloak from her shoulders, the woman came slowly along.

The lights streaming from the Eastern depot met her eyes.

"Bress de Lor!" she muttered, in accents that plainly betrayed her to be of the dusky race of Ham; "dere's dat depot fo' sure. By golly! dis yere ole woman's thankful!"

"Bow-wow!" said the dog, darting suddenly from the track in the snow left by the old woman's foot-steps, and approaching a snow-drift piled in a corner against the side of a house.

"W'at's de matter wid you?" growled the old woman, angrily, pausing to look after the dog.

"Bow-yow-yow!" cried the dog, sharply, and each particular hair on his body seemed to stand on end.

"You good-for-nuffin' Pete, w'at's de matter wid ye? I 'speck's you want fur to make me catch my deff of cold in dis yere wind."

The dog barked again and longer than before; then he began to root with his nose in the snow-bank; he called upon his paws to assist his nose, and began to scratch and dig with all his might.

"Dat ki-youddle mad for sure!" muttered the negress, approaching cautiously, plowing her way through the deep snow.

As the old woman approached, the dog paused suddenly, having made quite a hole in the light snow, lifted his snout and gave vent to a long and plaintive howl.

"Bress de Lord!" cried the negress, in affright, "dat dog howls as if dere was somebody dead."

The dog jumped to one side as his mistress approached, and began sniffing with his nose in the hole which he had made.

The old woman acted with caution; the night was dark, yet she could plainly distinguish the dark cavity in the snow. The action of the dog, unaccountable to her, had awakened a fear that she was about to behold something dreadful, and she was not disappointed.

Framed in the snow was a human face—the face of a young girl. The long hair, black as night, flowing loosely down, fringed in the pale face from whence the ruddy blood had fled. That face was so beautiful with its clear, transparent skin, white as the polished marble in its regular outlines and perfect proportions, that the old woman, in her simple way, thought at first she looked upon an angel who had strayed from heaven to earth, riding upon the bosom of the snow-cloud, rather than on a mortal like herself.

The negress stood like one transfixed: but the dog, being an animal, and therefore not given to human weakness, gave another howl, and then commenced to lick the face of the beautiful girl who lay in her bridal dress of snow, waiting for the coming groom, grim Death.

Tenderly the rough tongue of the dog lapped away the snow-flakes from the girl's face.

Coming to her senses at last, the negress bent over the senseless girl, and seizing her in her strong arms pulled her out of the snow-drift.

"She's dead for sure," the old woman muttered, as she held the light, motionless form of

the girl in her arms, but when she pressed her great black cheek against the alabaster one of the girl, she felt the warmth of the blood still coursing feebly in the veins.

"I 'speck's a little whisky would fotch her, kase dat's w'at it's good fur." Then she looked around her carefully. The inspection was hardly needed, for the driving snow and the howling blast alone surrounded them.

"I reckon dere ain't any State comfort'bles 'round," she muttered, "kase I don't want fur to have de whisky took away from me."

It was evident that the old lady referred to the State constables and the license law.

She drew a good-sized flask from her pocket, and removing the cork, forced some of the liquor down the throat of the senseless girl.

The yellow dog sat on his haunches, and with an air of intelligence, which plainly signified his approbation, surveyed the proceedings.

"Dere, honey, dat will fotch you!" the negress said, caressingly smoothing back the coal-black hair which, dank as wet sea-weeds, fringed the lovely face.

The liquor was of the worst kind, almost powerful enough in its strength and badness to raise the dead. Like a stream of liquid fire it coursed down the young girl's throat; a convulsive shudder shook her slender form, and a deep sigh came from her parted lips.

The snow still poured down pitilessly, and the cruel north-easter still roared and stormed, yet the old woman heeded not the driving snow nor the piercing wind; a human life trembled in the balance within her arms. What was the strife of the elements to the human struggle for existence?

The negress poured some of the whisky into her hand and bathed the girl's face with it. As the sufferer inhaled the powerful odor of the spirits, again she shuddered. The limbs stiffened for a moment, became rigid, then relaxed, and with a low mournful sigh, more like the echo of a sigh than a sigh itself, the great eyes opened—the great staring black eyes, almost superhuman in their wondrous beauty—so large, so bright, and within them shone a lustrous light, like unto the shimmer of the sun-shining upon the rolling waves of the great green ocean.

For a moment the girl stared blankly into the great black face that was peering down so closely into her own, then, amazement appeared within the great dark eyes.

"Ye ain't dead, honey, bress de good Lord for dat!" exclaimed the old woman, piously, the true spirit of thankfulness beaming in every line of her good, kindly face.

The girl turned her head slightly as if to gaze about her; the dog noticed the motion. Instantly he stood up on his hind legs and indulged in a series of short, lively barks. He understood that with nose and claws he had not dug in the snow-bank in vain.

"Don't be afeard, honey; dat's only Pete; he's a good dog; he smelt you out in de snow, jest like a little yaller angel," said his owner, with enthusiasm.

"Oh!" moaned the girl, feebly, her head sinking back on the arm of the negress.

"Does ye feel weak, honey?" asked the old woman, benevolence beaming in every wrinkle on her sable face. "Jes' take 'nuther suck at dat whisky."

"Who are you?" muttered the girl, faintly.

"Why, Lor' bress yer, I'se only Auntie Dinah," answered the sable-hued Samaritan. "I doesn't live yere. I lives down at Biddeford whar de big mills are, heap o' miles from dis yere place. I was jes' gwine to de depot when dat yaller dog o' mine—dat Pete, smelt you out in de snow-bank."

"Why didn't you leave me alone?" the girl asked, slowly, and with broken accents.

"W'at's dat, honey?" cried the old "Auntie," in astonishment. "By golly! dis yere ole nig nebber sleep a wink dis night if she'd left a gal like you in dis yere snow-bank. Dat ain't 'cording to de Scriptures."

"Go away!" muttered the undeniably unhappy sufferer, striving feebly to release herself from the grasp of the old woman.

"W'at, me! Lordy, w'at's dis ole nigger done dat you send her away?" cried the negress, in astonishment.

"I want to die!" the girl murmured.

"Oh, chile, I done guess you nebber reads de Good Book!" said Dinah, solemnly. "Dar ain't any use fur to talk like dat. De Lord isn't going fur to let you die, kase he sent Pete and me fur to pull you out o' de snow."

At the mention of his name the dog approached, and thrust his cold nose against the cheek of the girl; then he gave a quick, short

bark, a very joyful bark, which plainly told that he considered he had done a wonderful thing in rescuing the girl from the snow-drift.

"Dere, does you hear dat? It's ole Pete tellin' yer how glad he is fur to see you speak."

"I don't want to speak—I don't want to live," and the girl broke into a flood of tears—bitter, burning, scalding tears.

"You mustn't talk like dat, honey; dat's wicked, dat is."

"I am not fit to live," was gasped through tears.

"Lordy! you ain't done stole anything?"

"No!"

"Ye ain't killed anybody?"

"No, no!"

Then the old negress, perplexed, looked down at the hand of the girl; the hand so white and fair, it shamed the driven snow fresh from heaven's garner.

"She ain't married, kase dere ain't any ring on her finger," the old negress muttered to herself. "Maybe, honey, dat de young man dat you loved has fooled yer?"

"No, no, I have never loved any one," she murmured, the tears still streaming down her cheeks.

"Fore de Lor'! I'd like fur to know w'at dis yere poor chile has done?"

"Won't you go away and leave me alone?" the sufferer asked, plaintively.

"Leave you yere in dis snow-bank, honey?" exclaimed Dinah, in astonishment. "Why, dis old nig nebber hold her head up arter dat. By golly! I ain't gwine fur to let yer die dis bressed night."

"I must die!"

"If yer don't hush up now, bress de Lor', I set Pete on yer!" said the negress, threateningly.

"I don't care," muttered the girl, closing her eyes again.

"Dat dog, Pete, jes' eat yer right up now, sure. So, honey, git up and come wid yer aunty."

"No; I laid down here in this corner, so that I could die in peace under the snow. Go away, and let the snow cover me up and hide me from all the world."

A sudden idea came to the kindly soul.

"I 'speck you ain't got any money."

"Not a cent in the world."

"Ain't done got any friends, honey?"

"No, no friends."

"Dat's de reason you want fur to die?"

"Yes, one reason—but I am not fit to live!" exclaimed the girl, returning again to the old subject.

"Bress de Lor'!" cried the negress, in astonishment; "w'at has ye done?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

"Well, if ye ain't done nuffin', you isn't gwine to die. If you hain't got any money, jes' you come right along wid yer ole aunty. I lives 'way down in Biddeford, Maine. I'se jes' gwine fur to take de keers fur to go home. You kin come along wid me, an' when I gets you down dar, den you won't want to die."

A thoughtful expression came over the girl's features; it was plain that she was thinking over the offer.

"Biddeford?" she said, slowly.

"Yes, chile, it's a heap of miles from dis yere. Dere's whar de mills is."

"Mills?"

"Yes, honey; whar dey make de cloth."

"If I go with you, perhaps I could get work there?" the girl said, thoughtfully.

"Of course you kin!" cried the old woman, briskly. "I washes for de gemmen of de big-gist mill dere. I knows dem all."

"No one will know me at Biddeford," the girl murmured, evidently communing with herself, and unconscious that she was speaking aloud.

"Dat so, honey; will you be a good chile and come wid yer ole aunty?" the negress asked, assisting her charge to rise to her feet.

Standing, the girl was of the medium height, and even the loose waterproof cloak which she wore could not disguise the matchless beauty of her perfect form.

She was very weak and could not stand without assistance.

"But I have no money," she exclaimed.

"I kin pay yer fare, honey; dat's only lendin' to de Lord if you nebber pays me; but, bress you, honey, you'll make more money at dat mill in a week dan yer ole aunty in a month."

"I will go with you; what is your name?"

"Dinah Salisbury; Auntie Dinah de folks calls me."

"My name is Lydia—Lydia Grame."

"Dat's a putty name."

The old woman adjusted the hood upon the girl's head and smoothed back the dark locks. Then she supported her to the depot. The 8 P. M. Express bore the three—the dog Pete being the third one of the party—eastward to the State of Maine.

CHAPTER II.

THE MINSTREL BAND.

THE town of Biddeford, Maine, in the pleasant month of August.

In a large front room, in the Biddeford House, which fronted on the little square in the center of the village, were four men.

One sat by the window—a little fellow, with short cut hair and a huge mustache of almost supernatural blackness. It was just in the dusk of the evening, but still with light enough for him to read at a glaring "poster," printed in red and black, which was affixed to a board, leaning against the wall of the post-office building opposite, and which announced the coming of the "Original Alligator Minstrels."

The little fellow was the "celebrated Johnny Snodgers, the Silver Cloggist," vide the poster aforesaid.

Two more of the "Alligators" sat by a table in the center of the room—one, a short thick-set fellow, with a round German face; the other, a tall, thin, Yankee-looking personage, with a lantern-jawed countenance. The first of the two was known, professionally, as "Fatty" Kline; the other, Professor Handel Hill, the "world renowned violinist," vide "poster," as before.

The fourth one stood leaning carelessly against the mantelpiece—a young, dashy, handsome fellow of twenty-five, with the face and form of an Apollo. Golden hair curled in little silken clusters all over his shapely head; his features were regular and clearly cut; his eyes were large and full, a bright, deep blue. A golden mustache overhung his full, red lips, and a little imperial of the same hue graced his chin. He was dressed elegantly, quite a contrast to the shabby attire of his companions. He was known as Daisy Brick, and was the Manager of the "Alligators."

It was evident from the looks of the occupants of the room that a stormy discussion was going on.

"Well, this is the worst old party that I ever did get into," Mr. Snodgers said, with an air of disgust.

"I never see'd anything like it," the "champion tambo," Kline, remarked.

"I wish I had staid at home," Hill said, mournfully.

"Well, gentlemen, the 'Alligators' have 'gone up,'" Brick observed. "Mr. Snodgers, could you oblige the company with the favorite air, 'Up in a balloon, boys?' and the facetious minstrel manager commenced humming the tune.

A growl of disgust came from both Snodgers and Kline.

"If you had 'a' had the 'stamps' we wouldn't have gone up!" Snodgers exclaimed, indignantly.

"If you hadn't have made a beast of yourself by getting drunk last night, we might have been able to have a show to-night, and so have gone on to the next town," Brick retorted, but without a trace of annoyance in his manner.

"Well, you didn't know how to manage the show, anyway," Snodgers said, in a sulky way.

"No, not such 'show' folks as you are," Brick said, quietly. "When you got acquainted with me in Boston and suggested the speculation, I thought that you were a regular minstrel performer. If you had told me that you were only a Natick shoemaker out of a job, I shouldn't have risked what little cash I had."

"I'm just as good as the fellers wot gits the high sal," Mr. Snodgers remarked, with an air of dignity.

"In your own opinion, yes; but the great public, who pay their money, don't think so," Brick replied.

"That's 'cos I ain't appreciated."

"And you never will be, I'm afraid."

"Why don't you go on, Mr. Brick? Perhaps we may do better somewhere else?" Hill asked, in his sober, innocent way. The manner of the violinist was in strong contrast with the low, vulgar tone of the other two.

"No, thank you," said Brick, quickly and dryly. "I've had about all I want already. I'm not a brag; I know when I've got enough. I'm two hundred dollars out of pocket, and that's quite sufficient."

"Where's the rest of the boys?" asked Snodgers, suddenly.

"By this time I rather think that they are

all down at the depot, waiting for the next train to Boston. Each one came and told me confidentially that he was going, and that he wasn't going to say anything about it to the rest," Brick said.

"I guess we had better go, too!" Snodgers cried, suddenly, rising. The others followed his example.

Snodgers and Kline seized their hats and instruments and rushed out of the room without taking any notice of Brick. But Hill approached and offered his hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Brick," he said; "I'm really sorry that you didn't have better luck; it's too bad."

"Oh, it's all right, old fellow," Brick replied; "we would have run if the rest hadn't been such a set of infernal scalawags that there was no getting along with them. Take my advice and don't have anything to do with them; you're the only gentleman in the party. Good-by."

Hill departed and Brick was left alone. He took the chair that Snodgers had vacated, and sat down by the window; then he drew a cigar from his pocket, lit it, and gazed idly out into the street.

"When one door shuts another opens, they say," he mused, between the fragrant pulls of smoke. "Where is the door for me? What a deuced strange world this is, anyway! Here, from the age of twelve up to the present time, I have lived in the world by gulling my fellow-man—swindling, the world terms it. Now when I got into this infernal speculation I had a little over two hundred dollars. My conscience reproached me; the aforesaid conscience said, 'Brick, you have been an infernal swindler all your life; now, here's a chance to be an honest man; become the manager of a minstrel band, and make a fortune by swindling the public collectively instead of individually.' I listened to that 'small, still voice,' and what is the result? For six days I have been compelled to associate with the biggest lot of blackguards that I think exist in the world; not a gentleman in the crowd but one. I discover—too late—that my minstrels are all humbugs—hangers on to the sable ranks, scalawags of the worst kind, who disgrace themselves as they have disgraced me. Thank Heaven I'm clear of them, and now once more to use my wits to fool the world out of their loose change. It's a pleasant evening. I'll take a stroll up the street."

Brick descended the stairs. As he emerged from the doorway, a young fellow who was standing near by came forward and accosted him.

"Good-eve'g, Mr. Brick," he said.

The speaker was a tall, rather ungainly-built specimen of humanity, with a "tow-head," a sharp, angular face, but lit up by a shrewd, good-humored smile and keen gray eyes.

"Good-evening, sir," Brick replied, rather at a loss as to who the speaker was.

"Don't remember me, du you? Show!" exclaimed the stranger, "guess I've got a leetle the advantage of you. I met you t'other night when you g'n a show up to Dover."

"Oh, yes, I remember now," Brick said, extending his hand. "Do you reside here?"

"Guess I do; I'm tew hum here; I'm clerkin' in a grocery store up the street yonder, jest round the square. Say, du you ever h'ist any p'ison?" inquired the Yankee, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"Well, once in a while."

"Got a leetle the nicest New England rum up to the store you ever did see. Got a bottle when I was in Boston t'other day. Like to have you come up and sample it; make your hair curl."

"Well, I don't mind," Brick said, and the two proceeded up the street.

"Say, you don't g'n a show to-night, du you?" the Yankee asked.

"No; the concern is shut up."

"Bu'sted all to smash, eh? Well, I don't want to flatter you. I see'd the thing up tu Dover, an' I thought it was the all-firedest worst show I ever did see."

"It was pretty bad, that's a fact; you see, I was deceived about the performers I had," Brick said.

"Yes; guess you don't know my name, du you?" said the Yankee, suddenly.

"No, I do not remember it."

"Jeremiah Gardner; folks all call me Jerry for short, though."

Just then a couple passed the two; a young girl and a tall, fine-looking young fellow.

Brick caught a glimpse of the girl's face and stopped suddenly. His companion looked at him in astonishment.

"Hello! What's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"That lady that passed," Brick said, a strange expression upon his face.

"What of her?"

"I think I know her—no! I didn't exactly mean that," he said, just a little confused, but what I mean is that she looks like a girl that I used to know down South."

"I guess she never was down South," Gardner said; "leastways, I never heard her speak of being down there."

"You know her, then?"

"Well, I should say I did," Gardner replied. "She lives in the same house I do—boards with my mother."

"She does?"

"Yes; her name is Lydia Grame. She works in the big mill across the river."

"A mill-hand, eh?"

"Jest so; but don't you go to turning up your nose at her because she is a mill-hand. I tell you, our Yankee mill-girls ain't to be sneezed at, and as for Lydia, she's jest as nice a lady as ever walked on shoe-leather."

"She looks like a nice girl," Brick remarked, carelessly.

"Well, she is now!" Gardner exclaimed, earnestly. "She's the gal in this town. Why, she's got more beaux than you could shake a stick at in a week; that is, I mean, that she could have 'em if she wanted 'em."

"Who is the young fellow that she is walking with?" Brick asked carelessly.

"That's Sinclair Paxton; he's treasurer of the mill she works in. His father's about the richest man round these parts; owns more of the mill stock than any other man, 'cept Daddy Embden, perhaps."

"And who's Daddy Embden?"

"Jest the queerest old codger you ever did see. He lives in the big house up on the hill, back of the hotel; got a darter, putty as all possessed. Ain't she got a temper, though? I tell you! She makes 'em stand 'round when she gets a-goin', they say. Old Daddy Embden used to be as poor as Job's turkey 'fore the war."

"How did he make his money?"

"That's more than anybody knows. He used to own a little coasting schooner that carried market truck all along from Portland to Bostin, but when the war broke out, he an' his schooner disappeared." Then Gardner lowered his voice, mysteriously. "Folks will talk, you know, an' they du say that he made his money running the blockade down South."

"Running the blockade?"

"Yes, carrying medicines and powder and arms to the Rebs."

"Oh, I understand."

"No tellin', you know, whether there's any truth in it, but after the war, he came back with plenty of money—sed he made it spec'latin'—an' built a big house up on the hill, an' he cuts an awful swath—that is, his darter, Delia, does. As for the old man, he goes 'round, lookin' more like some old pauper than the boss of the concern."

"But this young fellow—this—?"

"Paxton, Sinclair Paxton."

"Yes; is he the favored suitor of Miss Lydia?" Brick asked, with apparent carelessness.

"Show! I guess he ain't!" Gardner cried, quickly. "Sid is a putty good feller, but she don't care for anybody. I b'lieve though, he jest loves the very ground she walks on; so does Jed Hollis."

"Jed Hollis, who's he?" Brick began to be interested.

"Jest the smartest young mechanic that there is in the State of Maine. Got two or three patents a'ready—smart as a steel-trap. Only got one fault. When he comes skimpin' 'round Lydia, an' she tells him out an' out that she don't care for him, he goes straight off an' h'ists more New England rum than would run a small-sized grist-mill, an' swears he'll lay out Sid Paxton some time. You see he fancies that the gal cares more for Sid than she does for him."

"Then there will probably be trouble between them?"

"I guess so. If Jed—Jediel's his name—ain't plaguey careful he'll get the worst on it, for Sid's a hefty feller an' spry as a cat. Used to be a sailor; run away to sea when he was a boy. His father, Deacon Edmund Paxton, 's one of the old stock, nice a man as ever lived, only a leetle crusty; his folks came over in the Mayflower, but they do say that one of the Paxtons, 'way back, married an Injin queen, an' that's where Sid gets his dark hair an' eyes from. He's a good feller, but jest as cold as an iceberg. I guess the old man would cut up like all possessed if he knew that Sid was hangin' 'round Lydia."

"Miss Lydia is not rich then?"

"Rich! Well, I guess she ain't, *much*; besides, she's a stranger here. The old deacon would think more of that; he's good old New England stock, you know. Now, Daddy Embden thinks more of money than any thing else. I guess he'd let Delia marry the biggest rascal in the world if he had only money enough. But, 'tween me an' you an' the bed-post, I guess that Delia would marry Sid Paxton if he hadn't two cents to rub together."

"You are pretty well acquainted with the way things are going on in the village," Brick said, laughing.

"Oh, yes; don't have much to do here, you know, but to watch our neighbors," Gardner said, with a grin. "But, there's one thing I would like to know, an' that is, how Daddy Embden made his money. He never come by it honestly, I'll swear."

Then the two, having turned the corner, approached the store. A huge elm shadowed the house.

"We use the fluid for med'cine, you know," Gardner said, with a wink. "'Cos we don't drink any thing stronger than water, down here in the State of Maine."

CHAPTER III. LOVE.

TWENTY or thirty yards below the grocery store to which the talkative Yankee had conducted Brick, was a small, two-story cottage. Woodbine and honeysuckle clustered around the door, and a great rose-bush covered fully one side of the house.

Within, the house was neat and prim. The little parlor, with its angular black chairs of state, its round center-table, innocent of dust, and stuffed rocking-chair, was very cosy indeed.

In the parlor, sitting by the open window, inhaling the rich odor of the fragrant vines without, was the girl, known as Lydia Grame, the mill-hand, and Sinclair Paxton, the treasurer of the largest mill in Biddeford, in Saco, rather, for the mill was on the Saco side of the river.

Lydia Grame we know already. She has not changed a great deal since the night when the "feller" dog Pete and the old black woman rescued her from the cold embraces of the snow-drift. Her cheeks have grown a little fuller and the blush of health has succeeded the pallor of cold and exhaustion.

She was dressed very neatly—a light, fleecy gown, white, with dainty scarlet strips running through it; a knot of ribbon of the same hue gathered at the throat, holding the little white collar together, and a flame-colored ribbon twined around the head, binding in the glorious black hair.

There was a great resemblance between Lydia and her lover, Sinclair Paxton.

He was tall and straight, with a stately, noble head well poised, broad shoulders, and muscular in build. His eyes were black as the sheen of sable velvet, and quick and piercing as the orbs of a panther. His hair was brown-black, wavy and rather long, curling around his ears. His face was a peculiar one—a rather sad face; a face that betrayed that its owner's pathway in life had not been always in the sunshine, and that a full measure of cares and sorrows had traced the tell-tale lines beneath the eyes. A face though, despite its sad look, which could light up with a smile, so pleasant, so beaming, that it made the person look five years younger.

Paxton was a man of thirty. If report spoke truth, one who had seen a great deal of the world, had traveled to far-off foreign climes, as a common sailor before the mast; yet in his veins ran the best blood of New England—the Mayflower blood, that may, in the olden time, have expressed itself in harshness, when impelled by the fanatic religious spirit, but never yet had lent itself to low trickery or deceit.

Sinclair was an only child, the sole heir to one of the richest men in the State of Maine, and yet he loved the simple mill-hand, Lydia Grame, the poor girl who gained her bread with her own hands by daily toil.

The two had just returned from their walk.

Lydia was looking more thoughtful than usual. She had cast her hat upon the center-table, and sitting down, was gazing absently out of the window.

"What are you thinking of, Lydia?" Paxton asked, in his rich, melodious tones.

"I do not know," she replied, slowly.

"That is strange," he said, with a quiet smile upon his dark face. "You are thinking deeply about nothing."

"I own I can not very well explain my thoughts, and yet I am thinking about something."

"Lydia, will there ever come a time when you will think of me?" Paxton asked, earnestly.

"Oh, why do you ask such a question?" she said, mournfully.

"Because I must ask it," he replied, quickly. "It is impossible for me to sit here, look in your face, and not put such a question to you. Lydia, I love you."

"So you have said before," the girl answered, bending her full dark eyes upon the earnest, noble face of Paxton.

"Lydia, I have asked you to be my wife, and you never yet have answered me."

"Answered you?" she said, slowly, crushing a leaf between her white fingers.

"Why not say yes or no and end my suspense?" he questioned, eagerly.

"Why should I say yes or no?" she said, slowly. "Why can not we always keep as we are?"

"As we are!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes; you tell me that you love me—"

"And do you not believe me?" he said, earnestly, interrupting her.

"Believe you?—yes!" she exclaimed, looking him full in the face with her brilliant dark eyes, and impulsively extending her hand to him.

The little white hand once a prisoner in his broad palms, he did not suffer it to escape again.

"I know that you love me," she continued; "you have proved it in a hundred ways. I am far below you in station, only a poor girl—"

"Oh, what nonsense you talk!" he exclaimed, lightly, again interrupting her. "There is no disgrace in honest labor."

"True, yet rich men's sons do not usually seek poor girls for wives."

A shade came over his face.

"Do not speak of my father's wealth in connection with me," he said, gravely. "Think of me as I am—simply Sinclair Paxton, working for my bread exactly as you work for yours."

"But you get a great deal more money for it than I do," she said, laughing.

"That is true," he said.

"But to return to what I was saying," she observed. "You love me and I like you. I am happy in your society. You talk about the same things that I like to talk about; you like the same books, the same poets. Why not then continue as we are? Why speak of love—and marriage?"

"Because that is the natural sequence to love. I want you for my own, for all time to come," he replied.

"But I do not think that I love you well enough to marry you," she said, slowly. "Think how dreadful it would be if I should marry you and then afterward discover that I loved some one else better."

"I have little fear of that," he said, confidently. "I am certain that you will never marry me until you are sure that you do love me; and, Lydia, I think that I know you well enough to feel assured that yours will be no fickle love."

"You think that you know me?" the girl said, slowly, and a strange smile appeared upon her beautiful face. "Are you sure that you really know anything about me at all? Remember, I am almost a stranger to you; a short eight months ago you and I were strangers to each other. You do not know anything about my past life; you do not know what I may have done, what I may have been. Are you not venturing your love upon an uncertain sea? Many a ragged reef may rear its head beneath the surface of the shining wave."

"With love for my pilot, I do not fear," he replied. "I feel sure that your past life has been as blameless as is your present one."

A shudder passed over the slight form of the girl. Paxton felt the little hand grow suddenly cold and tremble within his own.

"What's the matter, Lydia?" he asked; "your hand is as cold as ice."

"Oh, nothing," she said, with a sad smile. "I am nervous sometimes, and— But there, don't ask me to give you reasons for any thing I do. A woman, you know, never reasons."

"What a strange girl you are, Lydia!" he exclaimed.

"Do you know, I think so sometimes," she said, quite earnestly and thoughtfully. "I do not seem to have any thing in common with the rest of the world."

"We would make an excellent couple, then, Lydia, for they say that I am strange, too," Paxton said.

"Well, you are."

"Tell me in what way."

"Why; you sometimes have such odd, silent fits; you look so grave. Then, too, you love me, only a poor girl; one, too, who has frankly

told you that she did not think she would ever care for you in the way you wanted her to."

"Possibly because the actions of the girl belie her words," he said, quietly.

For the first time, a slight blush came into her pale cheeks and forehead.

"I do not understand how that can be," she said, puzzled.

"You wish me to explain?"

"Yes; I confess I do not understand. I have always tried to act toward you as I should act to a very dear friend, a brother, one for whom I could feel a sister's love."

"Ah!—and a quiet smile crept over his face—"you have always *tried*; you have been regulating your conduct toward me by rules, then? You feared to follow the impulses of your heart."

"I did not say that!" she cried quickly.

"No, but the application follows. Will you answer me one question?"

"That depends altogether upon what the question is."

"Do you have to regulate your conduct by rules in regard to any one else?"

The girl was silent for a few moments. She looked down at the floor, then suddenly she raised her eyes to the young man's face.

"I do not wish to answer that," she said, shyly, a half-smile creeping over her face.

"You blame me for loving you when you give me such encouragement as that?" and a smile appeared on his dark face also. "You do not make such rules in regard to any one else. If report speaks true, I have a dozen rivals for your love, and yet I do not fear any one of them. Do you know why?"

The girl shook her head.

"Because you do not fear them."

"I do not understand."

"You do fear me; that is, you have determined not to love me and you fear that you will do so, despite yourself."

"I am no match for you in reasoning," she said, slowly.

"You do not deny the truth of my words?"

"Of what avail would that be? If I did, in your logical way you would clearly prove that I did not; therefore I shall not attempt it," she said, smiling.

"Therefore, it clearly follows that, if I prove in 'my logical way' that you ought to marry me, you will do so without further argument."

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "I shall not be quite so positive as that. But you said just now that by my acts I encouraged you to hope. Now I confess I cannot remember doing anything at all to encourage you, except showing, possibly, that your society is pleasant to me; but *that* is only friendship, not love."

"Unconsciously you betray to me that you do care something for me," he said, gravely.

"Please explain."

"A moment since, impulsively, you extended your hand to me. I took it; it has remained in my grasp ever since, and you have manifested no desire to withdraw it."

She looked him in the face for a moment; the blush upon her cheeks deepened, and then she quietly withdrew her hand from his, and turning her face away, looked out of the window.

The twilight was ripening fast into the somber gloom of the night. The crickets were singing merrily, and the perfume of the flowers, borne on the gentle breeze of the evening, filled the little parlor with a sweet, intoxicating odor.

It was a time for love—that dreamy, quiet twilight.

"By my own words I rob myself of the pleasure of holding that little white hand within my own. I speak—for you bid me speak—even though I feared that my words would displease you."

"You attach too much importance to trifles," she said, coldly. "I am foolish sometimes, and yield to impulses, then blame myself afterward. I was unconscious that my hand had remained in yours."

"And upon that unconsciousness I build my hopes. If within your heart you did not care something for me, you would have been conscious that my hand held yours a prisoner. But I fear that I have offended you, so I will say good-night, and trust that before we meet again you will have pardoned me for speaking so plainly."

Paxton rose, took his hat, and opened the door. Lydia did not move until the door creaked on its hinges. Then, suddenly, she rose to her feet, and, through the dusk of the coming night, with outstretched hands advanced toward her lover.

"You are offended now," she said, plaintively.

"Offended, Lydia!" he exclaimed, in deep

tones, full of suppressed passion; "offended at you, the girl whom I love beyond expression?" and he clasped the extended hands of the girl within his own broad palms, then, with a sudden motion, which she did not strive to resist, he drew her to his breast and folded his strong arms around her, pressing her close to his heart.

Like one incapable of motion, passive she laid her head down on his breast and nestled closely in his arms.

"You are so noble—so good to me."

"And why should I not be?" he asked, pressing his lips caressingly upon the pure, white forehead. "I love you, Lydia—how well, time alone will show—and I shall go on hoping and loving that some day you will return that love."

"You must not love me; I am unworthy of you," she murmured.

"You are a foolish child to say so," he replied, and then with a tender, caressing touch he endeavored to raise her head and bent over to kiss her; their eyes met—they could just distinguish each other in the dusky twilight; she shook her head.

"No," she murmured, softly, "not my lips. You may kiss my forehead—my cheek, if you like; when I yield my lips to you, then you may know that I love you, although I may never speak the words that say so."

"Good-by," he said, bathing her forehead with little soft kisses. "I must not stay longer; you have made me so happy!"

A moment, and he was gone.

Lydia leaned against the door-casing; the very air seemed less sweet, wanting his presence. She felt like one in a dream.

"Do I love him?" she murmured, slowly.

"Is there such happiness in this cold, cruel world for me? His love would make this earth a very heaven!"

Then she went slowly to the mantelpiece and lit the lamp which was placed there. As she turned, she saw a figure standing in the doorway. A look of horror came over her face. With outstretched hands she gazed with dazed eyes upon the stranger.

She recognized the man; it was Daisy Brick!

CHAPTER IV.

HUSH MONEY.

WITH a face as white as the mantelpiece to which she clung, Lydia gazed upon the man in the doorway.

There was a quiet, pleasant smile upon the features of Daisy Brick, as he surveyed the girl; a smile that betrayed a great deal of satisfaction.

But the look upon her face was one of horror; had he been a specter, newly risen from the grave, her eyes could not have stared more intently—her lips have been more white.

"Good-evening, Miss Grame," Brick said, removing his hat and bowing in his easy, graceful way. "No doubt you are astonished at seeing me here in this quiet country town. I can assure you I was very much surprised when you passed me a short time ago on the street. I recognized you at once. I have such an excellent memory. I inquired who you was, and they told me, Miss Grame."

"Why have you come here?" the girl said, quickly, and the hard-drawn breath that came from between the pearly teeth plainly told how intense was the feeling that filled the heart of the speaker.

"Accident alone, my dear Miss Lydia," Daisy replied, with another charming smile.

"Go away at once!" the girl gasped, rather than spoke.

"Go away!" Daisy exclaimed, in a tone of amazement.

"Yes, your presence is death to me."

"Death!" Daisy's wonder was unfeigned.

"Why, how can that be?"

"Why have you hunted me down?" the girl demanded, with white lips and staring eyes.

"My dear Miss Lydia, let me assure you that my visit to Biddeford has nothing whatever to do with you. How could I guess that you were here? What object have I to hunt you down? I am not a detective officer, nor have I any malice whatever toward you. You passed me on the street—leaning on the arm of a very fine-looking young man, by the way—I recognized you; and what more natural than the desire to call upon an old friend?"

"I do not believe you!" the girl cried, bluntly. "Your coming here means no good to me. You are my evil genius. From the moment that I saw your face dates all the misery of my life."

"You have learned to hate me then, Lydia?"

For the first time the smile upon Brick's face faded, and a cold, cruel look came into his blue eyes.

"Hate? No, no; that is not the word!" exclaimed the girl, quickly. "I loathe—fear you; you inspire me with horror. I know that you mean me some dreadful wrong. I am helpless, powerless against you. Your presence makes me mad—wild with fear."

The look of pain upon the white, distorted face of the young girl would have moved a heart of stone, but it had but little effect upon Daisy Brick.

"As I have something particular to say to you, and as the saying of that something will take up some little time, I trust you will excuse me if I take a chair."

The young man pulled the rocking-chair from the corner into the center of the room and sat down in it. The girl never stirred from her position by the mantelpiece, but with the wild look of the wolf entrapped in the pitfall, glared upon her visitor.

"You seem very comfortably fixed here, Lydia," Daisy said, after a glance around the cosy little parlor. "When we parted, you said you were tired of life and wished to die. I see, though, that you still live."

"Because I am a coward," the girl said, bitterly. "I have not the courage to kill myself. I was near death once, but a fellow-creature stepped from her path into mine, and rescued me."

"Why should you want to die?" Daisy questioned. "A young, beautiful girl, the blood in your veins full of life, full of passion," and Daisy laid a strong emphasis upon the word. "Life should have many charms for you. If report speaks true, all Biddeford is at your feet—and prettier feet Biddeford could not kneel before. They say that you are the belle of the town; a dozen suitors follow your steps, eager for your smile; yet you are only a poor mill-girl."

"My face is my fortune, sir, she said—"

And your face is your fortune, my dainty Lydia; a fortune which I think that I ought to have a share in, Lydia, my charmer. I am in that state which expressive men term 'broke,' and vulgar ones, 'busted.' I want money. I suppose it is hardly necessary to mention that that is a very common want. You must help me."

"I help you!" cried the girl, and a hot, angry flush came over the marble-like face.

"Exactly—don't trouble yourself to speak: I know what you are going to say. You'd see me further first, and then you wouldn't. But you mustn't say anything of the sort, because you are going to do exactly as I want you to in this affair. This is just like a romance, you know. I possess a certain secret concerning you; yield to my demands, or I speak! Isn't that thrilling? I tell you!"

"I do not care whether you speak or not," cried the girl, hurriedly. "I will not be the slave that you would make me."

"You don't care for the opinion of the world?"

"No, I do not!" Lydia said, desperately.

"You do not care for the opinion of Sinclair Paxton, either, eh?" and there was a cruel smile on Daisy's face as he put the question.

The girl started; her bosom heaved and the deadly whiteness again came over her face.

Brick laughed—a low, exulting laugh.

"Oh, what a dear, sweet, innocent child you are!" he said, in mockery. "You love this fellow, eh? He has triumphed where I failed. This cold-blooded, icy New Englander has taken you for all you're worth. You don't care for the opinion of the world, but you do care for him. Now I'll speak plainly. Yield to my demand, or else I'll interview Mr. Sinclair Paxton, and tell him some few particulars of the life of the girl who now calls herself Lydia Grame."

The tone of banter was all gone now, and brute assurance had taken its place.

"How much money do you want?" Lydia said, slowly and with downcast head.

"All that you can give me," Daisy replied, bluntly.

"I haven't much."

"I won't take any more than you possess," Brick said, with an ugly sneer, "and you needn't look as if you were going to be killed right off without judge or jury. There isn't any need of being heroic in this matter. Make it my interest to keep my mouth shut, and you are perfectly safe as far as I am concerned."

"I have only thirty dollars in the world," the girl said, slowly.

"Thirty, eh? Well, give me twenty-five."

"And you will go away?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes."

"And never trouble me again?"

"Oh, I can't promise that!" he exclaimed, with a slight laugh. "The secret that I possess is worth more than twenty-five dollars. Suppose I should go to Sinclair Paxton and say to him, 'I know all the particulars of the early life of Lydia Grame; you love her; give me fifty or a hundred dollars and I will put you in possession of a secret which makes her a slave to the man who knows it.' Don't you suppose that he would jump at the offer?"

"No," the girl said, quickly; "he would not use such a power, even if he possessed it; he is too noble."

"He's a man, and in love with you; few men in this world who are not idiots once in their lives when a pretty woman is in the case," Daisy said, sarcastically.

"Then when this money is gone, you will come back for more?" the girl asked, slowly.

"No, not that exactly. My head is clear and my wits good. I would rather trick my living out of the great world of gulls, than force you to support me with your hard earnings. But at present I am hard pushed, and must have money. I will be honest with you. I will not call upon you for aid if I can possibly do without it."

"Wait a few minutes and I will bring you the money," Lydia left the room.

Daisy looked after her thoughtfully.

"What course of action shall I take in this matter?" he asked, communing with himself. "Shall I let this love affair go on—let her marry this Sinclair Paxton? By Jove! the thought is wormwood, for I love her myself; that is, as much as I can love any one. But if I let her marry this fellow, through her I can get at his money. Ah! that's a magnificent idea," and Daisy rubbed his hands together softly.

The adventurer judged others by himself; he did not for a moment doubt that the young girl would really marry her wealthy suitor.

Lydia's return put an end to his meditation.

In her hand she held a little roll of bills.

"There," she said, and she gave the money into his hand.

"Just twenty-five," he said, glancing at the bills.

"Yes, and now go!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

He rose to his feet, a grimace on his face.

"You turn me out without ceremony," he said, moving toward the door.

"Because I cannot breathe freely while you are here!" she exclaimed.

"And yet there was a time—"

"Do not speak of the past!" she cried, hurriedly, interrupting him. "I have striven to forget—prayed that the past might be a blank to me. For mercy's sake do not recall the dreadful thoughts."

"Well, I will bid you good-by," he said, carelessly. "I will remain in town for a few days, so you need not be astonished if you see me. It will be as well that we should appear as strangers to each other, for it might lead to troublesome questions if it was known that we were old friends."

"Friends!" said the girl, with a bitter accent, and her lip curled.

"You dispute that, eh?" he cried, laughing. "Well, we won't quarrel about a word; good-by."

His step sounded in the entry, and then the garden gate creaked behind him.

Lydia sunk down in the rocking-chair; her strength was all gone now, and a flood of scalding tears poured from her eyes.

CHAPTER V.

THE YANKEE SKIPPER.

UP on the hill, overlooking the village, stood the mansion of Peleg Embden, better known to the good citizens of Biddeford as "Daddy" Embden.

The mansion was a great, overgrown structure with huge Grecian columns in front, which gave the building more the appearance of a meeting-house than a private dwelling.

The grounds surrounding the house were elaborately laid out. A tremendous effort had been made for style. Money, rather than taste, was plainly evident both in the mansion and its surroundings. It was as if the owner of the estate had tried to build a house which should impress one with the idea of great wealth at the first glance.

In the sitting-room of the house, which was magnificently furnished, sat Peleg Embden and Delia, his daughter, his only child.

The gas was burning in a drop-light on the center-table, near which the young girl sat sewing.

Delia Embden was a little, slender girl of two and twenty, with a face rather shrewish in its expression; a small, delicate face, not handsome and yet not plain, for there was a bright, winning look in the small gray eyes and a rare charm about the dainty, thin-lipped mouth. The whitish yellow hair, too, which was so neatly and deftly braided and coiled around the shapely little head, was strangely pretty; it matched so well with the white skin, so wondrous in its pearly purity.

The girl would have been lovely but that her face was too thin, her eyes too small, and her nose too large.

But she was pretty in spite of these defects. A nimble-fingered, active, "smart," bright New England girl.

She took the whole charge of her father's household, and many a wise old village gossip predicted that Delia Embden would make a real smart wife for somebody.

Peleg Embden sat by the window, gazing vacantly out into the darkness of the night. He was a little, withered, dried-up old man, with a small peaked face, sharp, rat-like eyes, and a general expression of shrewd cunning upon his features. He was very poorly dressed. Biddeford folks said that "Daddy" Embden was lost in a decent suit of clothes.

Embden's rise to wealth had been a sudden one; and how or where he made his money was a mystery to all. He had been the captain of a little coasting schooner which traded in "truck" and "garden-sass," all along the coast from Rockland to Boston. His home was in Biddeford, and there his wife and daughter lived while he was away. His wife, a careful, hard-working woman, took in sewing, and thus aided in keeping the home comfortable.

For years "Skipper" Embden had sailed the Nancy Jane—so the schooner was named, after his wife—up and down the coast, but in the year 1864 his wife died, and after her funeral Embden and his schooner sailed out of Saco Pool, and the places that once knew them knew them no more.

A year passed away, and during all that time the white sails of the Nancy Jane, and the withered form of Skipper Embden standing by the tiller, gladdened not the eyes of the dwellers along the rocky New England coast.

Men predicted that the coasting "smack," and her owner had found a grave beneath the billows of the Atlantic.

But one bright morning in the month of June, 1865, just at the close of the war, Peleg Embden made his appearance in the streets of Biddeford.

To the many anxious inquiries as to where he had been for the past year, he simply replied, "after money." Little satisfaction he gave to the questioners.

A few days after Embden's return the good people of Biddeford made a discovery which caused them to open their eyes in wonder.

Peleg Embden owned about fifty thousand dollars' worth of stock in the Biddeford mills; and as the skipper of the Nancy Jane, a year before, hadn't been worth fifty thousand cents, the natural question was asked: "How did Peleg Embden make his money?"

It soon became evident that Embden was quite a wealthy man. He bought a site on the hillside and erected a splendid house thereon, paying cash for everything.

Some of the village gossips who had been intimate with Embden ventured to ask him how he had made his money.

"He," he replied, with a knowing wink, but the details of his sudden rise to wealth he kept to himself.

This reservation did not become a man who had made his money by honest speculation—at least, so thought the greater part of the Biddeford folks, and there were not wanting tongues to affirm that Peleg Embden never made his money honestly.

Dark whispers went round of blockade-running between the Virginia capes—of the Nancy Jane carrying medicines, percussion-caps, and other light articles—contraband of war—to the Southern forces. And whispers again told of murder on the high seas, and pictured the Nancy Jane flying the black flag from her peak, and Peleg Embden as the desperate and bloody-minded commander of a gang of pirates, forgetting that the aforesaid smack was only some ten tons burden and that a dozen fair-sized men would have found difficulty in procuring decent accommodation aboard of her.

But one thing was certain: the Peleg Embden who came back to Biddeford was quite a different man from the skipper of the Nancy Jane, who had left it but a year ago.

Before, he had been a free-spoken man, with a cheerful word for every one; now, he was reserved and moody. He seemed suspicious of all, started at the slightest noise like a criminal fleeing from justice.

An unhappy, desolate, speechless man was the Yankee skipper.

And now as he sat glaring out of the window into the darkness of the night, he seemed strangely agitated.

Delia sewing by the center-table heard her father muttering, and rising in alarm, approached him quickly, anxious to discover what had alarmed him.

Seated in a low easy-chair, facing toward the window, Embden, with a face distorted with pain, was looking out of the casement.

Delia looked in vain for the object which was agitating the old man so strangely. She saw only the great, gloomy wall of darkness—night's mantle which covered in the earth—and through the darkness gleamed, like a golden star, a single light, coming evidently from some lamp placed near a window of one of the houses down in the hollow.

Leaning on the back of her father's chair, she listened to his murmured words.

"The tide turns at nine, Jethro; why don't he come? The light is fixed all right; everything is safe and—a false beacon-light which leads the vessel on the rocks!" With a sigh of pain Embden threw his head back against the chair.

"What's the matter, father? Are you ill?" the girl asked, kneeling by his side, and looking up into his face.

"Ah, Delie," he muttered, vacantly, and again fixing his eyes upon the gloom before him. "There's the signal."

"The signal!" said the girl, in wonder.

"Yes; don't you see it?"

"No."

"The light there?" and with a shaking finger the old man pointed out into the gloom.

"Oh, yes, I see that; it's in some cottage window."

"No, no, no!" cried the old man, hastily; "it's on the point. There goes the signal now—he's waving it round his head three times. Don't you see it move? Now, Jethro, answer it. Vail our light once, then again—that's twice, and that means, all right."

Vainly Delia looked into the darkness; the light moved not; she saw that her father's mind was wandering.

"I can not see that the light has moved at all, father," she said, gently.

"Your eyes are not as keen as mine; you've not coasted from Cape Cod to the Penobscot twenty years as I have. There's the signal again! Answer it, Jethro!" he said, in feverish anxiety, his eyes glaring. The girl had never seen her father so strangely affected before.

"He's there, but where are they?" he questioned, his eyes still fixed upon the glimmering light. "There goes the rocket!" and the old man was convulsed with emotion in every limb. "He knows now his danger. Hear that shot! They're on him! Up with the anchor, Jethro! Tisn't our fault. Don't h'ist a sail—let her drift down the river! Oh! Heaven have mercy on his soul!"

Exhausted, the old man sunk back in his chair and closed his eyes wearily.

"Why, father, how strangely you talk!" the girl exclaimed; "it is all imagination. You must be sick. Hadn't I better make you a strong cup of tea? Do come away from the window." With gentle force she raised the old man from the easy-chair and supported him to her seat by the center-table.

"Delie, I've been talkin' strangely, hain't I?" Embden said, suddenly.

"Yes; but you are not well, father," she said, gently.

"Yes, a leetle sick," he said, slowly. "Delie, dear, eighty-one thousand dollars is a heap of money," he spoke reflectively.

"Yes, it is, father."

"Kin you reckon what the interest on it is for a year at six per cent?"

"Yes, father."

"Cipher it out, Delie; it's payable on demand; mebbe he'll come for it, who knows?" Closing his eyes wearily, Peleg Embden dozed off to sleep, while Delia sat and wondered who the person could be to whom her father owed eighty-one thousand dollars.

CHAPTER VI.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.

AFTER leaving the cottage Sinclair Paxton walked slowly down the street.

The intoxication of passion was still upon him; the soft perfume that clung like a charm

to the person of the young girl, seemed still with him.

Like one in a maze he walked onward. Cool, clear-headed Sinclair was strangely agitated.

"Does she love me?" he murmured; "she is such a strange girl that it is difficult to tell. She would not let me go to-night when she thought that I was pained by her coolness. She gave herself up freely to my embrace, although she denied me her lips. Time alone must solve the mystery. I wonder what my father, the deacon, would say if he knew how deeply I am interested in this girl, really a stranger of whom I know nothing? He will hear of it some day, and then there will be trouble. It seems to be my fate to annoy him."

"Hello, Sin, is that you?" cried a well-known voice, and Jerry Gardner advanced through the darkness.

"Yes; taking a walk, Jerry?" the young man answered.

"Wa-al, a leetle of that an' a leetle of some-thin' else," Jerry answered, slowly. "Say, Sin, which is your best 'holt,' running or fightin'?" Jerry asked, suddenly.

Sinclair was astonished at the question.

"I really don't know," he said; "why do you ask such a question?"

"'Cos there's trouble ahead. Do you know Jed Hollis?"

"The carpenter? I know him; what of it?"

"I s'pose you know he's kinder sweet arter a certain young lady that works down in your mill?"

"Yes, I have heard a rumor to that effect," Sinclair said, quietly.

"Wa-al, Sin, I hope you won't think that I'm pokin' my nose into business that don't consarn me, but I have heard that the young lady I spoke of jist now, likes somebody else as well as she does Jed Hollis, if not a darned sight better, an' of course it's nat'ral that he should go t'arin' 'round 'bout it like a bob-tailed horse in fly-time."

"Very natural," Paxton said, dryly.

"An' nat'ral, too, that he should threaten for to do all sorts of things."

"Yes; but if I know anything of Mr. Hollis, he's likely to say a great deal more than he'll do."

"Right, there, by hokey!" Jerry exclaimed, emphatically. "But, Sin, he's as ugly as Satan to-night. He's been gitting outside of more good old rum than you could shake a stick at in a week. He heered that the young lady was out walking with a chap about your size to-night, and he's been swearin' fit to lift the shingles off a roof ever since. Now he's jist drunk enough to make a break for you, Sin; in fact, I think the pesky cuss is layin' in wait for you somewhere; so jist keep your eyes 'round. Jist take a fool's advice an' don't let any one git too close to you in the dark."

"I am much obliged, Jerry, for your warning, but I trust that he will have better sense than to provoke an encounter with me," Paxton said, in his usually quiet way.

"He's cavortin' 'round wuss than a yaller dog with a tin pan tied to his tail," Jerry said, with a grin. "He kinder thinks that he owns all Biddeford, you know. He's the bully of these parts. Sin, I'd give a hull quarter of a dollar for to have you tan him good, once; might make a pretty decent feller out of him."

"I shall try to protect myself," Paxton replied, not a tinge of boasting in his tone or manner, but the light that shone in his eyes and a certain compression of the lips told of danger.

"Wa-al, good-night, Sin; don't let him get the furst crack at you, for the cuss can hit like thunder," and with this parting warning Jerry went on his way.

Paxton passed slowly onward, his mind busy with thoughts of Lydia. Vainly he pondered on the question, "Was he loved?"

The young man went through the village and descended to the bridge which led over the river to Saco. The Paxton residence was on the other side of the river in the old town.

Just as Sinclair came to the middle of the bridge, the moon which had hitherto been concealed behind a dark bank of clouds, came forth and lighted up the night with her silvery rays.

Some twenty paces beyond him, leaning on the parapet of the bridge, Paxton beheld the dark figure of a man.

He recognized him at once. It was the carpenter, Jediel Hollis.

With a steady step, as if unconscious of danger, Paxton went on. Hollis never stirred until Sinclair was within six feet of him, then suddenly he raised from his lounging position, and planting himself in the narrow passageway, barred the path.

Paxton halted; had he proceeded he must have trodden Hollis underfoot.

The moonlight shining down full upon the face of the young carpenter, plainly revealed that he was under the influence of liquor. There was an ugly look upon his face which boded mischief.

"Good-evenin'," he said, insolently.

"Good-evening, sir," replied Paxton, taking no notice whatever of the insolent manner of the other.

"Fine evenin', ain't it?" Hollis exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Nice night to go an' see a gal, ain't it, eh?" demanded Hollis, anger sparkling in his eyes.

Paxton's brows contracted slightly, and with his eyes he measured the drunken carpenter from head to foot, but replied not.

"How was she, anyway? Did you kiss her when you left?"

"Are you drunk or mad?" asked Paxton, in contempt.

"Both!" responded Hollis, fiercely. "Oh, you can't put on any airs with me. I know I'm only a carpenter, an' you're one of the big-bugs, but just now we're both on us only two men, an' one of us is agoin' to get thrashed like blazes soon, if not sooner. So just peel off your coat an' we'll go at it," and the carpenter commenced to take off his coat.

"You intend to fasten a quarrel on me, then?" Paxton asked, coolly.

Hollis stopped with his coat half off, and glared at Sinclair for a moment.

"What else should I wait here for you for?" he cried. "We can have a fair shake here. Over this bridge you don't go until you fight me."

"Why should I fight you? Because you have drank so much liquor as to upset the few brains that you do possess and must quarrel with some one?" Paxton asked contemptuously.

Off came Hollis's coat; the rage of the carpenter was so great that it seemed to almost make him sober.

"I'm a match for you, drunk or sober!" he cried. "You've won my girl away from me, an' if you ain't a sneak you'll fight for her."

"Did the lady ever tell you that she cared anything for you?" Paxton asked.

"What's that to you?"

"You accuse me of taking her away from you; now, if you never possessed her love, I couldn't well rob you of it," Sinclair answered.

"Oh, curse your arguing!" Hollis cried, "I can fight better!" and springing forward he aimed a desperate blow at Paxton's face, but Paxton slowly stepped back and with his open palm parried the blow and threw it to one side.

Two, three, four blows the enraged carpenter made, all of them falling on the empty air. Out of breath, Hollis was fain to pause.

"You contemptible drunken brute; I've half a mind to give you a lesson!" Paxton said, sternly.

"You give me a lesson!" howled Hollis, frantic with rage. "Just you stand still and let me smash you!"

The carpenter made another desperate rush at Paxton. Thick and fast fell his blows. Lightly and easily, as though in the sparring school, Paxton turned them aside, until at last, losing patience, he drew back his right arm and sent it out with the swiftness of the lightning. The blow landed full on the neck of Hollis, just under the right ear, and sent him spinning round like a top; then dashing in, Paxton seized him by the collar, swung him over the parapet of the bridge, and held him suspended there.

"I've half a mind to let you drop!" he cried.

CHAPTER VII.

BITTER BLOOD.

With a grip of iron Paxton held the now sobered carpenter over the dark waters that rolled so unceasingly beneath the bridge.

Hollis grasped the parapet of the bridge with his hands and attempted to pull himself up, but with a single twist of his muscular wrist, Paxton swung him off into empty space again, and held him there as though he were but an infant. Hollis for the first time realized how great a task he had taken upon himself when he had made up his mind to thrash Sinclair Paxton.

"I've half a mind to let you drop," Sinclair repeated, a frown contracting his brows.

"Drop me and be hanged!" growled Hollis, savagely. "I ain't a-going to cry quits yet."

"Are you not satisfied?" demanded Paxton.

"I'll be even with you yet!" cried the carpenter, in defiance.

"You have brought this upon yourself. I wished to avoid a quarrel with you but you

would have it, and now I'd let go and drop you into the stream, but that I am not certain as to what is underneath. If I was sure that it was water and not a ledge of rocks, down you should go, for I think that a cold bath would do you good, and perhaps chill your angry passions a little."

"I don't care whether you drop me or not!" growled the carpenter, sullenly.

"No, I do not seek your life, nor do I care to have you lay a broken limb at my door; so just give me your promise that the affair shall end here, and I will land you on the bridge again," Paxton said, calmly.

"I'll see you in blazes first!" cried Hollis, in anger. "Do what you like, but blood can only end this thing between us now!"

"You idiot!" cried Paxton, suddenly, for the first time betraying traces of anger, and with a swing of his powerful arm he landed Hollis on the bridge, then threw him from him, releasing his grip on his collar.

The carpenter reeled and fell heavily to the floor of the bridge.

Paxton clenched his fists together, and with an angry frown upon his face waited for Hollis to rise.

Slowly, the carpenter rose to his feet, but he evinced no disposition to advance to the attack. He seemed like one dazed by a sudden shock. With an expression of astonishment upon his face, he felt of his neck where a lump had arisen, the mark of Sinclair Paxton's white knuckles.

"Come, I am waiting," Paxton said, impatiently.

Hollis did not reply, but stooped and picked up his coat and proceeded to put it on.

Paxton's lip curled in scorn, and a glint of fire came from his eyes.

"You are satisfied, then?" he asked.

"For the present, yes," Hollis replied, sullenly, "but a time will come when I'll get even with you for this night's work." And with this threat, darkly delivered, Hollis strode away.

Paxton watched him until he disappeared in the darkness beyond the bridge; a look of utter contempt was upon the face of the victor.

"A bully, and as usual, a coward," he said, quietly. "I must be on my guard against him, though. He means mischief. He will not be apt to measure open strength with me again; now I must look out for low cunning."

With a confident smile upon his handsome face he walked slowly on.

As he left the bridge and came into the gloomy shade of the buildings beyond, he cast a quick and earnest glance around him. He fully expected to see Hollis's form lurking in some dark corner, but he was disappointed; the carpenter had disappeared.

Paxton proceeded directly up the hill and through the village to his home, which was a stately old-fashioned white house situated on the main street of Saco. For a hundred years or more the Paxtons had lived there; few New England families could trace further back than they.

In his room, which fronted on the street, Paxton removed his coat, lit a cigar, and sat down by the window.

As he gazed out upon the moonlit street, the cool night breeze, fresh from old ocean and laden with the balm of the sea-weed and the salt spray, sighed and sung with a low and mournful cadence through the leafy branches of the giant elms which adorned the roadside. One face alone appeared before him; forgotten now was the assault on the bridge; he thought only of the dainty maiden, the mill-girl, Lydia Grame.

Strange was the power which her fascinations exercised over the heart of Sinclair Paxton; yet no boy was he, but a man well tried in life's fiery furnace; one who had loved and lost. Was it fated now that he should love and lose again?

Paxton had not noticed Hollis although he had looked for him after leaving the bridge, yet the carpenter was concealed in a dark corner just beyond the structure.

"Quietly and without moving hand or foot, he watched Paxton until he disappeared in the gloom as he ascended the hill. Then, Hollis came from his hiding-place and stood in the street.

The moonlight shone down full upon him. He seemed like a man in a dream. Every now and then he would feel of the lump on his neck, and then look up the hill as though he expected to see the tall figure of Sinclair returning through the gloom.

"Oh, blazes!" he muttered, suddenly awakening from his stupor. "My neck feels as if I had

been kicked by a horse." He's more than a match for me, curse him!" and the carpenter glared sullenly around him. Then he turned and walked rapidly across the bridge. He paused in its center and looked down into the darkness underneath. The ripple and splash of the river rolling below, hastening onward to its grave, the sea, came to his ears.

"I've half a mind to jump over!" he cried, savagely. "There's forgetfulness down there. This girl has made me mad. I can almost curse the hour when I first saw her. This blamed Paxton, too; if I could only have given him a welting, I should have felt better. He's got the training of a prize-fighter. What a fool I am!" he cried, suddenly. "I forgot that he's been a sailor; it's only natural that he should know how to use his fists."

Hollis proceeded onward again with rapid strides. As he left the bridge and ascended the little hill on the Biddeford side, a thought suddenly came to him.

"I'll go and see Lydia at once!" he cried, in his nervous, impulsive way. "I'll ask her right out plain to have me, and if she refuses—"

He paused on the word; a flood of thought rushed through his mind.

To be refused by Lydia was the heaviest blow that could befall him, and yet as he thought the matter over, he could not remember a single action of the girl which should give him hope of a favorable answer to his suit. She had always treated him kindly, yet only as a friend, nothing more.

But drowning men will clutch at straws; few men in love who are not blinded by their passion.

"I'll do it, anyway!" he muttered, as he hastened onward. "She can but say 'no,' and if she does, why, that will end the matter, and I'll forget her."

Wise resolution, yet his heart told him that he had uttered a falsehood ere the words had left his lips.

He walked rapidly onward until he reached the street where Lydia's residence was situated. As he turned the corner, his pace slackened. He could plainly hear the beating of his heart as it thumped against his ribs.

With slow and faltering steps, strange contrast to his former reckless rate of speed, he approached the little cottage which held within its humble walls the prettiest girl in all the town.

A gleam of light came from the parlor windows.

Hollis halted, leaned upon the picket fence and looked toward the house. He could plainly distinguish a figure within the parlor, seated in the rocking-chair near the window. A single glance and he recognized the woman for whom his heart craved. And then his courage failed him. He feared to enter the house.

The girl was sitting quite still, close to the window, apparently in a deep study, for her head rested upon her hand and her eyes were fixed upon the floor in dreamy meditation.

For full five minutes Hollis remained motionless, leaning upon the fence, looking with all the eyes in his head upon the girl.

"What a cursed fool I am," he muttered, irresolutely. "Five minutes' conversation with her and I shall know my fate. Well, I can take my gruel like a man, anyway. But if she refuses me it will be because she cares for that confounded Paxton. Oh!" and he ground his teeth together fiercely, "it will be a long time before I get square with him, I'm afraid."

Lydia lifted up her head suddenly and looked through the window; she saw the man leaning on the fence watching her, and rose as if in alarm.

With abrupt resolution, Hollis opened the gate and entered the garden. Come what may, he would learn his fate before he slept that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE QUESTION AND ANSWER.

HOLLIS walked straight forward to the house; 'twas only twenty steps or so. Lydia had recognized him before he had closed the garden gate behind him. She remained motionless by the window. Her quiet face was a blank; neither pleasure nor annoyance at the approach of the young carpenter could he read therein.

"Good-evening, Miss Lydia," Hollis said, doffing his hat and halting at the foot of the steps which led into the house. His voice trembled as he uttered the simple salutation and the color came and went in his cheeks; in his heart he thanked the friendly night whose mantle of gloom concealed his agitation.

"Good-evening," Lydia said, in her quiet, gentle way.

The thought flashed instantly through Hollis's mind that she had not asked him to come into the house, and therefore his visit was unwelcome. The augury he drew was an evil one, but still he had worked himself up into such a state of desperation that, even with the feeling that his suit would be rejected, he made bold to press it.

"Do you want a visitor this evening?" he asked, endeavoring to put the question lightly and trying to force a smile upon his solemn face.

"I am not in a very entertaining mood to-night, I fear," Lydia replied, speaking only the simple truth.

There are none so blind as those who will not see. Again the omens were evil, but reckless, desperate, the carpenter pushed onward.

"For Miss Grame to be unentertaining is, I am sure, an impossibility," he said, courageously; but his daring was not of the kind that, with a smile, leads the Forlorn Hope into the trench raked by the musket-balls; it was rather the courage of the condemned criminal advancing to the gallows. His voice trembled and his heart beat so loud that he felt sure the sound must reach her ears.

But Lydia never noticed his agitation in the least. The thoughts in her mind had small reference to Jediel Hollis, the carpenter. Daisy Brick and Sinclair Paxton—strange contrast!—were the two men most in her mind.

"I ought to thank you for the compliment," she said, absently, "but I am so dull to-night that I am sadly afraid I shall make very poor work of it."

"Has anything happened to annoy you?" Hollis asked, anxiously.

"Oh, no!" the girl answered, quickly; "you must not think that. A woman, you know, is an unreasoning creature, and is privileged to be dull sometimes without reasons."

"I'll come in and sit down for a few minutes; perhaps I can cheer you up," Hollis said, wondering, too, at his own boldness as he made the speech. But he advanced into the porch, and through the entry-way into the parlor; his face, though, was white and his heart beat against his ribs with a sledge-hammer thud.

He placed his hat upon the center-table and sat down in a chair close to the window. Lydia had resumed her former seat, from whence she had arisen when her eyes had caught sight of Hollis leaning upon the fence.

With an anxious gaze the carpenter looked into the face of the girl. He saw nothing there to afford him hope.

After Hollis had sat down, there was an awkward pause. The desperate lover knew what he wanted to say, but knew not how to say it. Finally he broke the ice, so to term it.

"Have you been out this evening?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied.

Hollis was well aware of the fact when he asked the question. He had seen her upon the arm of Paxton, coming from the post-office, and it was that circumstance which had heated his rage and inspired him to lay in wait for his fortunate rival.

"It has been very warm to-day," he observed, still at a loss for words.

"Yes," she again replied.

Her answer did not aid him in the least.

Again there was a long and awkward silence; then, with desperate resolution, Hollis determined to say what he had come expressly to say.

"Miss Lydia, you and I have known each other some little time now," he said.

The girl opened her eyes in astonishment; she did not understand this strange beginning.

"I have something very particular to say to you, Lydia, and I trust that you will not be offended by my words," he continued, earnestly.

The quick ear of the girl noted the change in the tone of the speaker; she saw, too, the crimson blood mounting into his cheeks and the fiery glint of passion in his eyes. It was the first time he had ever addressed her familiarly as Lydia. She guessed now what was coming; gladly would she have stopped him in his speech, but knew not how; she was on her guard, though, and, like a skillful fencer, sought to break the attack and confuse her adversary by a brilliant "parade."

"Oh, I am sure that so good a friend"—and she laid a very strong emphasis upon the word—"as you have been to me will never say anything that can possibly offend. By the way, Mr. Hollis, are you going to the picnic next week? I suppose it will be a very enjoyable affair. I hope to be able to go." She never

gave him time to reply, but rattled on in a strangely unusual way for her. "Can I trouble you to tell me the time?"

With nervous fingers, Hollis opened his watch.

"Just ten," he said.

"So late!" she exclaimed, in accents of surprise. "It is time for me to think of retiring—early to bed and early to rise, you know," and Lydia rose from her seat; there was something feverish, unreal, in her manner. Even Hollis's passion-blinded eyes noticed it.

"I must bid you good-night," she continued, going to the door.

"Stay, Lydia!" cried Hollis, springing to his feet, his cheeks red as fire, and the hot blood surging in his veins. "I must speak a few words with you before we part to-night."

A long-drawn breath came from between the girl's red lips, and then she shut them tightly together.

"Won't to-morrow do?" she said, and there was a pleading, pitiful tone to her voice, a look of anguish in her dark eyes, not unlike that which shines in the orbs of the wounded deer as he tumbles to his knees in the forest glade and hears the knell of doom in the baying of the dogs and the ringing notes of the hunter's horn behind him.

"No, no, to-night!" he cried, impetuously, advancing toward her.

Again the long-drawn breath came from between the scarlet lips, and the heart in her bosom gave a great throb of pain.

"Lydia, I love you!" he cried, passionately.

"No, no, do not say that!" she exclaimed, and extended her hands as though she feared him.

"But it is the truth!" he replied, quickly and with nervous energy. "I feel that I cannot live without you. Sleeping or waking, your face is always before me. I cannot tell whether you care anything for me or not, but I care for you, and I must tell you of it. I cannot keep the secret any longer. Now you know the truth, and you hold in your hands all my future life."

Earnestly and passionately he pleaded his cause. Love, that before had tied his tongue, and made him dull and stupid, now gave him command of a torrent of words.

"Mr. Hollis, I will not attempt to deceive you, nor do I wish you to misunderstand me," Lydia said, her face white and strange restraint apparent in her manner. "I will frankly confess that I guessed what you wished to say and tried to keep you from saying it; but, since you have spoken, I must answer you. A love like yours a woman should not trifle with for a single instant. You have always acted like a friend to me, and I have tried my best to-night to avoid giving you pain; but, since you compel me to speak, I cannot say aught but the truth."

"You do not love me!" cried Hollis, desperately.

"No, I do not," the girl answered, firmly. "You cannot guess how much pain it gives me to speak this way, but I cannot say anything else. You have forced me to speak the truth, and it is not my fault if it is painful."

"It is your fault, though, that you have made me love you!" exclaimed Hollis, reproachfully.

"Now, you are unjust!" the girl said, slowly, cut to the very quick; "you have no cause to say that. I have never treated you except as a friend. My lover you never have been with my knowledge."

"You might have spoken before," Hollis said, sullenly, resting his elbow on the back of a chair, and his head on his hand.

"Spoken before?" exclaimed Lydia, in amazement; "how could I? How could I tell that you cared anything for me?"

"Why, I have been paying you attentions ever since you came to Biddeford," Hollis said, gloomily.

"You have been very kind to me, indeed," the girl answered, quickly, "and I thank you for it very much. I trust that I am fully grateful for all the little favors that you have done me."

"I don't want your gratitude; I want your love!" Hollis exclaimed.

"And that I cannot give you," the girl said, slowly and sadly.

"And why not?" he demanded, angrily.

"You have no right to ask me that question," she answered, quickly.

CHAPTER IX.

A MADMAN.

HOLLIS raised his head and looked the girl full in the face.

"Well, if you could give me a good reason why you don't care for me, I shouldn't feel so bad about it," he said, using the sulky tone of an overgrown school-boy detected in some breach of the master's rules.

"Why ask a woman for reasons?" the girl exclaimed, in bitter contempt. "What man ever lived who thought that a woman *could* reason? That is one of the proud prerogatives of your sex, not of mine."

"Have you any particular objection to me?"

"Have I not spoken painful words enough, already?" Lydia asked, impatiently. "What if there is something about you that I do not like? Is there any need that I should still further affront you by telling you of it? You have asked a question and received an answer; why not stop now?"

"Because I want to be satisfied," he said, half-angrily. "I know that you've got some reason for acting this way, and I want to find out what it is. You have always acted as if you did care something for me."

"So I do, as a friend," answered the girl, quickly. "Can not you understand that a woman can like a man and yet not love him well enough to marry him? A woman has many likings in her life, but she seldom loves but once."

"What a strange girl you are!" Hollis exclaimed, in wonder; "you talk like a school-master."

"The great world has been my school-room, and want and suffering are hard masters; the lessons they teach are bitter ones, and are not easily forgotten," the girl said, slowly.

"I think that I know one reason why you don't care for me," Hollis said, doggedly.

"Yes?"

"Because people say that I drink; so I do sometimes, but not enough to hurt me."

"Jediel Hollis, if I loved you better than any woman ever loved any man in this world, and should discover that you drank, I would sooner lie down and die than marry you," the girl said, with strange emphasis.

"Well, I should give it up altogether if I married you," he said, rather astonished at her earnestness.

"So many a man has said, and many a girl, trusting to a drunkard's word, has linked herself to a degraded brute. Few men in this world love their wives well enough to give up their pleasures for them," she replied, scornfully.

"And that's the reason that you don't care for me, eh?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "How many times must I tell you that I never thought of you as a girl thinks of a man whom she wishes to marry. I like you as a friend, and am grateful for the many little kind acts that you have done, but that is all."

"And you don't love any one else, eh?"

Sharply and abruptly Hollis put the question. The girl did not start at the question, or betray any sign of emotion, except that her lips shut together tightly for a moment.

"I do not think that I love any one in this world well enough to marry them," she answered, slowly and calmly.

"Not even Sinclair Paxton?" Hollis demanded, with bitter accent, all the evil in his nature roused into action at the bare thought of the man, the print of whose knuckles he bore even now beneath his ear.

"I do not understand why you should speak in such a way of Mr. Paxton," she said, slowly, and a troubled look appeared upon her face.

"You don't understand, eh?" he said, deliberately, and with a cruel joy, for he was convinced that at last he had hit upon the true reason why she had rejected his suit.

"No, I do not," and she raised her cold, calm eyes, and looked him full in the face. There was just a little bit of pride apparent in her bearing. "I cannot understand why Mr. Paxton, the rich treasurer of the mill, should ever be spoken of in the same breath as the poor mill-hand, Lydia Grame."

"Because all Biddeford says that he is your lover," Hollis replied, bluntly.

The girl got just a shade whiter, and the fire of her eyes became more intense.

"The Biddeford folks must have very little to talk about if they say such a foolish thing as that," she said, slowly.

"It's the truth, and you can't deny it!" Hollis cried, bitterly.

"I shall not attempt to," Lydia replied, calmly.

"I knew that it was the truth!" the carpenter exclaimed, in a passion. "I saw the way you hung upon his arm when you was walking with him this evening. I'm no fool, even if I am

mad after you. I'm sorry I ain't as rich as Sin Paxton!"

"Lydia flushed up just a little at the sneer, and a look of reproach came into her eyes; but Hollis, mad with jealousy, heeded it not.

"But I can tell you one thing, Miss Lydia Grame; when old Deacon Edmund Paxton consents to your marriage with his son, then the devil, who gave old Daddy Embden his money, will come after it, and about that time the world will end."

Reckless and brutal was the speech, and Lydia's blazing eyes told that she felt and resented the insult.

"You have forgotten yourself, sir, and, now, never dare to speak to me again!" she exclaimed.

A moment more and Jediel Hollis was alone.

He could hear the rustle of the girl's dress as she ascended the stair. A vague, wild thought came into his mind to rush after her and beg her to forgive and forget his frantic words, but a stubborn sentiment of pride held him back.

He snatched his hat from the table, jammed it upon his head, and rushed, like a madman, from the house.

Lydia proceeded directly to her own room. On the threshold she paused and listened.

She heard Hollis's frantic rush from the house, heard his steps ringing on the gravel walk and the gate slam behind him.

"He is a coward at heart," she murmured, "else he would never have said what he did."

Satisfied that he had really gone, she proceeded down-stairs again and closed up the house. All the household besides herself had retired.

Then she went up-stairs once more to her snug, cosy little chamber. The room was like its mistress, neat as wax.

Lydia commenced to disrobe for the night. She removed the little jacket she wore, and around her neck appeared a little blue ribbon. As she stood before the glass her eyes caught sight of the ribbon. With a deep-drawn sigh, she placed her hand upon the tiny band; the ends were concealed in her bosom; slowly she drew them out, and a piece of ivory about the size of a silver dollar came into view. Upon the surface of the ivory was the picture of a young and handsome man, exquisitely painted. The face was a true southern one, dark eyes and hair, the oval, Italian-like countenance, and the impress of fire and dash which the warm southern sun gives to its children.

A moment the girl looked upon the handsome face, and then she carried it rapidly to her lips, and kissed it again and again with passionate love.

And when slumber came upon her that night, pressed close to her heart was the ivory portrait.

After leaving the house, Hollis had hastened down the street at break-neck speed. The very air seemed close and heavy around him. He was mad with rage and passion.

"Oh, that cursed Paxton!" he muttered, frantically, as he rushed wildly onward. "Oh, I'd give ten years of my life to get even with him! I could get this girl if it wasn't for him. Ten years! I'd give all my life! I swear I'll kill him yet!"

And with the words a terrible scheme came into the brain of the almost crazy carpenter.

He stopped suddenly as if to commune with himself.

"I'll do it!" he muttered—"this very night, too. S'pose he's gone to bed? 'Tain't likely, for I've seen him smoking there as late as one o'clock. I'll try it any way. I had jest as lief be hung as not as long as I kill him!"

Again the carpenter hurried onward. He went straight to his boarding-house.

In his room he lit a match and lighted the lamp which stood on the little stand. Then he opened the drawer of the stand and took out half a dozen leaden bullets which were in one corner. He was careful to take them all.

In one corner of the room was a heavy black walking-stick with a small ivory head. This Hollis took, and then turning the flame of the lamp down quite low, left the room and house.

Straight he went for Saco.

The town reached at last, he hastened with noiseless tread through the main street until he arrived opposite to the Paxton homestead.

A single light appeared in the house; its flame showed through an open window, and by the window, in his shirt-sleeves, smoking, sat Sinclair Paxton, little dreaming of the assassin who lurked so near.

CHAPTER X.

THE ASSASSIN.

DEEP in thought, Paxton smoked away. The cool sea breeze gently stirred the locks of hair upon his temples. In the silence of the night he communed with himself.

"What a strange spell this girl has thrown around me," he muttered, removing the cigar from his lips and watching the fragrant smoke as it curled in eddying circles upward. "She is wonderfully beautiful; there is a charm about her that insnares me despite myself. I wonder what my father would say if he knew of this fancy of mine for one of the mill-girls? He, with all his pride of his old New-England descent. He's a sensible man, though, and I feel sure that if he really knew the girl, he would not object. But, does she love me?" And long and deeply he pondered over the question, to him of all-absorbing interest. "She will not own that she cares anything for me, but if I know anything of women she does. When she thought that I was offended to-night, she would not let me leave the room until she was satisfied that I was not angry. A young girl is a strange riddle sometimes to us men, and why should they not be, when half the time they puzzle themselves?"

The cigar, burning down unpleasantly near to his fingers, interrupted his reflections. He tossed the stump out of the window, and lighted a fresh one.

"I do not feel in the least sleepy," he murmured, as he enjoyed the fragrance of the tobacco. "It is so pleasant that I do not feel like going to bed at all." Then he looked out into the quiet street, with its old and stately elms swaying their leafy tops in the ocean breeze. "How calm and peaceful the night is! Who, on a night like this, alone with the solitude of nature, could believe there was such a thing in this world as strife and toil? that man's angry passions could rage on this fair earth which whispers so wooingly of peace and love?"

Crack!

The sound came from the window-pane above his head. In utter astonishment, Sinclair looked up and beheld a bullet-hole drilled through the glass of the window.

The truth flashed upon his mind in an instant.

"Some one is shooting at me with an air-gun!" he cried, impulsively, and then over his nature came the animal passion of the chase—the hunt for blood.

Quick as thought he acted; he pulled open the drawer of the little table which stood by his side close to the window, and snatched a little revolver which lay therein; then, with a panther-like bound, he sprung through the open window. Hanging by his hands from the window-sill, he dropped lightly to the ground; it was only some fifteen feet, and the soft turf underneath broke the force of the fall.

So rapid had been the action of the young man that the assassin, who had fired the air-gun, concealed behind an elm on the opposite side of the street, had no time after firing the shot to attempt to escape.

Hidden by the shadow thrown by the house, and crouching upon his hands and knees low upon the earth, Paxton took a survey.

As the shot had passed squarely through the glass, boring only a little round hole, Paxton came at once to the conclusion that the person who had fired the shot must be concealed behind one of the trees on the other side of the street. But to get at him was the puzzle. The middle of the street was as light as day, exposed as it was to the bright rays of the moon, and to attempt to cross it would only give chance for a second shot, which might be fired with better aim than the first.

But if Paxton could not get at the unknown foe, neither could he leave his ambush without danger of discovery, except by retreating through the grounds of the house right behind the tree-trunk which served him for shelter.

Paxton's keen eyes took in the situation at once. The breadth of the street alone separated him from the ambushed foe. He felt sure that he could detect the slightest movement of the unknown if he should attempt to leave the shelter of the tree and escape through the grounds of the house behind him. So Paxton coolly stretched himself out at full length upon the soft turf, and, with his ear to the ground, waited.

Ten—twenty minutes passed away, and no sound save the night wind rustling the leaves of the elms came to Paxton's ears.

His brows contracted.

"Can it be possible that he escaped while I was getting out of the window?" he muttered.

"If he did, he must be as quick as a cat, whoever he is."

Ten minutes more passed away.

Paxton had almost made up his mind that the assassin had indeed escaped, when he heard the slight noise which a man's feet make moving with caution upon a gravel pathway.

A smile of satisfaction came over Sinclair's face, and he drew back the hammer of the revolver, ready for action.

Then he heard a gate creak on its hinges, the sound denoting that it was being opened slowly and with caution.

The time for action had come.

Paxton sprung to his feet and dashed across the road, with the speed of a grayhound.

The man pursued had ears no less quick than he who followed in the chase. He guessed at once that the man whom he had tried to kill was on his track. He now abandoned all caution and rushed forward at headlong speed.

Paxton ran forward at his utmost pace. He reached beneath the tree which had given shelter to the assassin, and came to the gate through which he had passed. It was closed, but the pursuer stayed not to open it; laying his hands upon the gate-post, he vaulted over it, light as a bird.

The sound of the fugitive's footsteps, running at his topmost speed, guided Paxton in his chase.

The unknown ran straight through the grounds to the rear street. Over the fence he went into the street, across the street and into the grounds of one of the houses on the opposite side of the way, then suddenly the noise of his footsteps stopped.

Paxton had followed him hotly, but as he scaled the fence and came down onto the street, he noticed that the sound of the footsteps had ceased, and guessing that the fugitive again lay in ambush on the other side of the moonlit road, he did not care to cross it in full range of his noiseless weapon.

Quietly he nestled down under the shade of a large elm tree, and waited.

"I can play at hide and seek all night!" he muttered; "but he shall not shake me off, and when the morning light comes then I'll trap my bird."

The fugitive, who had gained the shelter of the fence on the further side of the street, had succeeded in winning one important advantage. He could steal off, his footsteps deadened by the soft garden loam, with much less noise than when forced to tread in the gravel walk.

The breath of the assassin came hard, for the run had been a breather, short as it was.

Eagerly and intently he listened. Not a sound could he hear except the breeze playing with the leaves, or the distant howl of some wide-awake dog baying the moon and making night hideous with his discordant yelps.

He did not for an instant think, though, that Paxton had given up the chase; he knew him too well for that. He guessed instinctively, that his pursuer lay concealed, waiting for some sign of his presence to again follow on his track.

Cautiously, therefore, he moved away from the shelter of the clump of bushes by the garden fence, beneath which he had found shelter, and stole noiselessly across the garden.

The garden fence was a high one, built by for him, and thus concealed him from the observation of the watcher on the other side of the street.

A dozen steps had the fugitive taken, and not a sound betrayed that his pursuer was on his track. A half-smile came over his face, for he saw safety before him. A dozen more steps, and he was half-way across the garden—still no sound of pursuit.

"A narrow shave, but I shall escape," the fugitive muttered, hoarsely.

A dozen more steps and he was within ten feet of the rear house of the grounds; beyond the fence was the open country and that meant safety.

No sound of rapid footsteps in the rear.

The fugitive had paused for a moment to listen, when from the porch of the house, with open mouth and savage growls, a good-sized dog came bounding toward him, and hardly had the brute given tongue when the footsteps of the pursuer again rose on the air.

The dog's bark had warned him as to the whereabouts of the fleeing man.

"Get down, you brute!" cried the fugitive, hoarsely, springing to the fence. The dog followed close behind, and emboldened by the flight of the man, sprung savagely at his leg as he essayed to mount the fence.

The teeth of the dog almost met in the flesh of the fugitive's leg.

Maddened with pain, the man leaped to the ground and dealt the dog a terrible blow upon the head with the heavy walking-stick which he carried with him. With a yelp of pain the dog retreated, almost stunned by the stroke.

The man again sprang to the fence and leaped over it.

But the contest with the dog had taken time, and when the fugitive had scaled the fence Paxton was not thirty paces behind.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHASE.

THE open country now lay before the pursued and the pursuer.

First came a long reach of meadow-land, a mile or so in extent, some half a dozen fences across it, beyond that a strip of timber, the commencement of the wood.

That black strip of woodland, standing out clear against the moonlit sky, was the only hope of the fugitive. Could he only succeed in gaining that, there he might find shelter and hope of escape.

With desperate energy the man ran onward. He felt not the pain coming from the wound in his leg, although the blood had freely followed the teeth of the dog. Fast after him came Paxton.

When half the meadow was past, the fugitive glared behind him to note the position of his bloodhound-like follower, and he set his teeth together in rage when he saw that Paxton was gaining steadily upon him. Then he looked before him and his heart sunk as he noted how far beyond lay the wood, his only hope of escape.

His breath was coming thick and hard, and the great drops of perspiration stood out like waxen beads upon his forehead. He felt, too, that his strength was failing fast. Another last desperate effort he made to gain ground and shake off the unflagging pursuer. Vain was the effort; with steady, unflinching strides Paxton gained upon him.

A good quarter of a mile yet lay between the fugitive and the woodland screen. To cover that distance without being overtaken the fleeing man felt was clearly impossible.

Then, with the courage born of desperation, with the same brute instinct which inspires the wolf at bay to turn and fight for his life, the pursued man suddenly halted, wheeled around, and drawing the walking-stick—the air-gun—up, attempted to level it at Paxton.

But the young man was ready, and before the fugitive could level his weapon fairly, he had covered him with his revolver.

The moon's rays glistened along the little barrel pointed full at the breast of the fugitive.

"Drop your hand, Hollis!" cried Paxton, in cool and determined tones, halting, "or I'll put a ball right through you."

A moment Hollis—for the midnight assassin was the young carpenter—glared at Paxton, and then seeing the folly of resistance, and reading in his eyes that he would surely keep his word, with a hollow groan he dropped the air-gun to the ground.

"Kill me if you like," he said, despairingly.

Paxton approached slowly.

"Hollis, are you mad?" he asked, looking more with pity than with anger upon the man he had hunted down.

"Yes, I s'pose so," the carpenter answered, sullenly.

"You must be to have done what you have to-night. Why should you attempt my life? What have I ever done to you?"

"You have taken away the only woman that I ever cared for," he replied.

"You mean Lydia Grame?"

"Yes."

"I am not aware that I have taken her yet."

"But you mean to; it's all the same."

"That depends a great deal upon whether she is willing or not."

"Oh, there ain't much doubt about that."

"How can you tell that?" Paxton asked, quickly.

"I can see it plain enough. I offered myself to her to-night, and she refused me."

"Well?"

"She refused me because she loves you."

"Did she tell you that?" and Paxton's heart beat violently as he put the question.

"No; but I know it well enough!" Hollis answered, sullenly.

"How do you know it?" Paxton demanded.

"Well, I guess at it from the way she acts. Of course she won't own that she cares any thing for you, but I know she does, and that's the reason why she won't have me."

"Then you think that if I was out of the way that she would listen favorably to your suit?"

"Well, I don't know that exactly," Hollis said, slowly.

"Then why in Heaven's name do you put your neck in peril by attempting my life?" Paxton asked. "If by the act you could gain her love, I should not wonder at your attempting it, but since you freely confess that you do not think that it would have that effect, you must be mad to act as you have."

Hollis looked at Paxton for a moment in wonder. The case had never been brought so clearly to his mind before.

"Well, I suppose I am mad," he said slowly, and after quite a long pause. "But I hate you because I think the girl cares for you."

"And, to gratify that hate, you are willing to put your neck in a halter?"

"When a man is mad he don't think of such things," Hollis replied.

"Ah!" and Paxton's lip curled. "Now, my friend, just listen to me for a few moments. I am neither an angel nor a saint; to forgive is not one of my virtues, if I have any such things. A man never struck at me yet but what I paid it back with compound interest, if I could. But, the way you are going on, the debt will be so great that I never shall be able to pay it. Now, I don't choose to let it go on. You are either sane or mad; if the latter, then you ought to be in a lunatic asylum. But I have an idea that, even if you are crazy, there is considerable method in your madness. It is rather disagreeable, the reflection that one can not sit down by a window of one's own house and enjoy a cigar after nightfall without hearing a bullet whizzing past his ears. In the future, another mad fit may seize upon you and you may feel inclined to make a target of me again, so I just want you to write that you have attempted my life to-night, and sign your name to it."

Hollis looked at Paxton for a moment in amazement.

"But I don't understand the reason—"

"Oh, don't you?" said Paxton, with a sarcastic smile. "I'll explain then. If I should happen sometime in the future to die by the secret hand of an assassin, this little paper, signed by you, might be a clew to aid the officers of justice in finding out my murderer."

Hollis saw the trap he was in.

"It is nothing but a new sort of life assurance," Paxton continued, dryly. "I think that I shall live longer if you accede to my request."

"And if I do not?"

"Then I'll take you into Biddeford and put you through a course of sprouts for this night's work," Paxton replied, coolly.

"I'll write."

"Good! I am glad that you are reasonable about the matter."

On the back of an old letter, Hollis scribbled the brief confession and signed his name to it.

"You will not use this against me unless I trouble you?" Hollis asked, doubtfully.

"Rest easy on that point; you are perfectly safe as long as you behave yourself."

"I'll try to, but it's hard work for a man to give up the girl he loves," Hollis said, mournfully.

"Nonsense!" Paxton exclaimed, contemptuously. "A man loves a dozen times in his life, and he always fancies that the last love is the strongest. A man who goes mad after one woman when the world is full of others just as precious, deserves to be sent to a lunatic asylum. And, by-the-by, if you have any more such attacks as this one to-night, that is most decidedly the proper place for you."

"You're a devilish queer man!" Hollis exclaimed, in wonder.

"Oh, no, that is only your fancy," Paxton answered, carelessly. "But now that we understand each other we had better part. A word before you go. Never in this life blame a man for winning a woman's love; blame the woman always, for she cannot be won unless she consents. Good-night."

And with this cynical remark, Paxton turned upon his heel and strode away.

Hollis watched him for a time in wonder.

"He's just the kind of man to win women," he muttered; "he don't care anything for them, and that makes them crazy after him."

Sick at heart and weary of life, Hollis walked slowly back to Biddeford.

His slumbers that night were far from pleasant, and the smarting wound in his leg, where the dog had left the imprint of his teeth, troubled him not a little.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HIRED GIRL.

BREAKFAST was just over in the Embden mansion, and the old man and his daughter sat together in the sitting-room which fronted on the garden.

A newspaper was in the old man's hand, but his eyes were not fixed on the printed page.

Old Daddy Embden was 'strangely out of sorts.

Delia noticed his feverish manner, and came over to his side quietly, and commenced to smooth down the rough sandy-gray hair.

"What's the matter, father?" she asked, caressingly; "you don't seem well this morning."

"I ain't well," the old man replied, tersely.

"Didn't you sleep well last night?"

"Delie, gal, I didn't sleep much at all," he said. "I was dreadful oneasy all night. I've bin thinkin' over somethin' which bothers me a good deal."

"What is it, father?" and the girl brought a chair and sat down by the side of the old man.

"Wal, it's a ticklish p'int," he said, slowly.

"Of course you read all about the war?"

"Yes." She wondered at the question.

"Wal, now, who was to blame for having all the men killed?"

"Why, I don't understand, father," she replied, in wonder.

"Wal, there was Jeff Davis an' all them Southerners on their side, an' there was Abe Lincoln an' Seward an' a lot more on our side. Now, if it a-hadn't been for these men, there wouldn't have bin any war, an' the question I'm puzzling over is, ain't these men to blame for the ones who were killed jes' as much as if they had killed them with their own hands?"

Delia had never heard any such reasoning as this before, and she thought the matter over carefully, wondering all the time what could have put such an idea into her father's head.

The old man watched her with eager anxiety.

"Wal, what do you think, Delie—are they to blame or ain't they?"

"I don't think they are, father; it was the antagonism of principles rather than men that brought on the war."

"Then you don't think that the blood of the men who were killed lies at their doors, eh?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, I do not believe that any one would think so," she said.

"Tain't that, Delie!" he cried, earnestly; "tain't what any one in this world will think, but how will the account balance when it comes before the last Great Court?"

There was a feverish anxiety about the old man which was pitiful to behold.

"You mean the Day of Judgment, father?"

"Yes, Delie, that's what I mean; how will a man through whose means other men have died, stand there? Won't their blood cry out ag'in' him? Do you s'pose he'll stand any chance to be saved?"

"Father, I wouldn't think of such things," the girl said, coaxingly. "What does it matter? You had nothing to do with bringing on the war? They cannot lay any man's death at your door."

"Mebbe not, mebbe not," he muttered, absently—"but I'd like to be sure."

"Here's Mr. Paxton coming up the walk," the girl said, happening to look out of the window.

"Mr. Paxton!" the old man exclaimed, rousing himself out of his stupor.

"Yes, young Mr. Paxton—Sinclair," she said.

"Oh, I remember; he comes about the mill; a little matter of business."

"I'll run away, then, so as not to be in the way."

And she went out through the dining-room into the kitchen where Mary Ann, the "hired girl," was busy among the dishes.

Mary Ann was a brisk, comely girl of twenty.

"Show Mr. Paxton in; he's coming up the walk," Delia said.

"Sartin," Mary Ann responded, and she hurried away to the front door, which she reached just as the young man rung the bell.

Paxton was shown into the sitting-room, and Mary Ann returned to the kitchen.

"He's a nice-looking young man," Mary Ann remarked, with a sly glance at the face of the young girl.

"Yes," responded Delia, with an air of indifference which she was far from feeling, for Sinclair Paxton was a great favorite of hers.

"Pears to me if I had been you I would have gone and let him in myself," the hired girl continued.

"Why so, Mary Ann?" asked Delia, quietly, but there was a little red spot burning in each cheek.

"For a chance to have had a little quiet chat with him."

"Why, Mary Ann!" and the daughter of the house blushed to her temples; "why should I wish to chat with him?"

"I thought girls allers liked to see their fellers," Mary Ann replied, slyly, enjoying Delia's confusion.

"But he isn't my fellow," Delia protested.

"Isn't your feller?"

"No."

"Comes here pretty often."

"But he comes to see father on business."

"And not to see you?"

"No; of course not."

"Well, folks think that he comes here arter you. Lordy, Delia, I've heard a dozen say, what a nice match Delia Embden and Sinclair Paxton will make."

"I should think that folks might find something better to do than to talk about any such thing, particularly when there isn't a word of truth in it!" Delia declared with a flushed face.

"Oh, folks will talk, you know, Delia, and when they talk they must say something. Why, do you know I really thought that you and Mr. Paxton were engaged?"

"Why, Mary Ann!"

"Well, I really did; he's been here so much lately."

"It is because father has a great deal of business to transact with him, but he never comes to see me; I've walked down the street with him two or three times, but it was all an accident; we both happened to go out at the same time."

"Well, now, do tell!" Mary Ann exclaimed. "Well, I'm glad that he ain't your beau for one thing."

"Why, what is that?" asked Delia in astonishment.

"Cos he's got another girl," whispered Mary Ann, mysteriously.

The flush faded from Delia's cheeks, and a spiteful look came into her eyes. Although she had denied that Sinclair was her lover, yet it was plain that Mary Ann's intelligence was not calculated to give her pleasure.

"How do you know he has, Mary Ann?" she asked, with an effort to appear unconcerned.

"Oh, folks know all about it now," Mary Ann said, with an air of satisfaction. "They were out walking together last night. I guess the old deacon would have stared if he could have seen 'em."

"What is the girl's name?"

"One of the mill hands—same mill that Sinclair is treasurer of; her name is Grame—Lydia Grame."

"Oh, yes, I know her," Delia said, quickly; "that is, I don't mean that I really know her, but I know who she is. She hasn't been here very long."

"No, she came last winter; she's a dreadful proud, stuck-up thing; acts as if she thought that she was better than other people," Mary Ann said, with a toss of the head.

"She is very pretty," Delia observed, thoughtfully.

"Well, that's jest as people think," the hired girl added, a little contemptuously. "She isn't my style of beauty."

"And is Mr. Paxton really in love with her?"

"I ought to have jest seen 'em walking together last night!" the girl protested. "I took one look at them, and that satisfied me. I think that it's a shame that some one don't tell his father. He ought to know it."

"Why, she may be a very good girl, Mary Ann," Delia suggested, but there was a tinge of spite in her tone.

"Yes, she may be, and then again she may not be. There isn't anybody in Biddeford that knows any thing about her, who she is, where she comes from, or who she belongs to. Why, she may have a dozen husbands, for all anybody knows here!"

"I don't see how the deacon could stop it, even if he knew it," Delia said, thoughtfully.

"He'd find a way! Deacon Edmund Paxton knows more than all the rest of Biddeford put together. I only wish he knew all about it."

Delia did not reply, and the conversation turned upon other subjects. The seed was planted, though, in fruitful soil.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECRET STAB.

Just four and twenty hours after the conversation detailed in our last chapter between Delia Embden and the "help," Mary Ann, Deacon Edmund Paxton sat in his library, busy among his papers.

The deacon was a man of fifty—a tall, portly

gentleman, with silver-gray hair and a round, fat face, fringed by luxuriant silver-gray side-whiskers. His eyes were dark blue in hue, large and clear.

The deacon's face was fat and clean, red and white in color—sure proof of good living and of freedom from cares in worldly matters; yet, the massive under jaw, the firm and square-set forehead and a certain shrewd look about the eyes, told that the jolly and comfort-loving deacon had a strong will of his own, and was fully able to cope with his fellow-men in the great battle of life.

Edmund Paxton came of one of the oldest families in all New England. His ancestors had settled on the banks of the Saco when the powerful Tarrentines, the Penobscots and the Saco Indians ranged in their native freedom from the Salmon river to the St. Croix.

Old gossips told a legend how one of the Paxtons had once wedded a daughter of the great chief of the Saco tribe; how, in some mysterious way, the marriage had brought ruin and distraction to the red-men, and how the dying warriors, with their latest breath, had cursed the race of Paxton, and how the curse had clung to the family even to the present time.

But, old gossips will talk, and simple stories will grow by constant repetition into the dignity of legends, which must be received without question.

Pew, however, could look upon the placid and good-humored face of Deacon Edmund Paxton, and believe that any age-descended curse shadowed his life.

The deacon had inherited quite an estate from his father, and by thrift and care had so increased it that he was accounted one of the richest men in the State, east of Portland.

The arrival of the morning mail interrupted the deacon in his labors.

Three letters came; two of them in yellow envelopes bore the Boston post-mark. The handwriting was familiar to him; one was from his lawyer, the other from the mill-agent located in Boston. But the third letter the deacon examined with curiosity.

The superscription evidently was in a woman's hand, and disguised at that, too. It was a dainty letter, and bore the Biddeford post-mark.

It was addressed simply, "Edmund Paxton, Esq., Saco, Maine."

"Humph, it looks like a love-letter," the deacon murmured. "If it had been addressed to Sinclair, now, I should not have wondered, but I am a little too old for that sort of thing; too much in the 'sero and yellow leaf.'"

Then the deacon opened the letter.

It was extremely brief and very much to the point.

It read as follows:

"A friend begs to inform Mr. Edmund Paxton, that his son, Sinclair, has honored a young lady named Lydia Grame, a mill-girl, with his attentions so openly, that folks wonder when the marriage will take place."

And that was all; no signature was attached to it. It was written in a hand evidently disguised, but plainly written by a woman.

The deacon read the letter over a second time, and pressed his lips together gravely.

Then he opened and read the other two letters which were purely on business matters as he had expected. These disposed of, he returned again to the mysterious note.

"A mill-girl, eh?" he muttered. "I wonder which mill; our mill, I suppose. Grame—Lydia Grame; a rather odd name," he said, reflectively. "I don't remember any family about here of that name; she is evidently a stranger, then. I can understand this letter on that supposition. It is written by some young lady of Biddeford or Saco who doesn't like to see Sinclair captivated by a stranger. I wonder if there is any truth in it; and then again, I wonder who the girl is? I am going down to the mill this morning; it may be as well to inquire about this Miss Lydia Grame."

The deacon turned once more to his papers; in twenty minutes he had finished, then he left the library and dressed himself for the street.

He proceeded at once to the mill.

The superintendent, Anson White, Esq., was in his private office when the deacon entered.

A half an hour was occupied upon business matters, when the deacon suddenly remarked:

"By the way, White, I suppose you know the names of all the mill-hands?"

"Yes, I think I do. I have always made it a point to know all about the hands. Got an idea you know, that I can run the mill better," White replied. He was a shrewd, bustling

Yankee from 'way-down-East, and really a capital manager.

"Is there a girl in the mill named Grame—Lydia Grame, I believe?"

"Yes," White answered, promptly: "been here about six months, if I remember rightly."

"What sort of girl is she?" the deacon asked, quietly, and with apparent unconcern.

"Tall, with dark eyes, very ladylike indeed; she's above the average of mill-girls—very much of a lady."

"Is she a good hand?"

"Excellent! Hasn't missed a day I believe since she came to the mill. She's a very capable young woman. I took quite an interest in her when she first came, she was so quiet and ladylike."

"I've heard her spoken of, and from the description I fancy that I would like to see her."

"That's easy enough if it's not too much trouble for you to go up-stairs," White said, rising.

"Oh, no; although I am getting rather fat and old," the deacon said, good-humoredly, getting up from his chair.

"Well, deacon, you stand it pretty well," White replied.

"Yes, contrive to worry along. By the way, does Miss Grame stop in the mill boarding-house?"

"No; she boards in Biddeford, at widow Gardner's."

"Ah, indeed!"

Then the two proceeded into the mill.

Lydia worked in a room on the third floor.

The superintendent and the deacon sauntered carelessly through the room. Mr. White explained the working of some new machinery which had just been put in.

The two paused within twenty feet or so of where Lydia was at work.

As they stood there in conversation, White quietly indicated the girl.

"That's Miss Grame on the right—the girl with dark hair in the striped calico."

"Pretty, isn't she?" the deacon said.

"Yes, and do you notice how ladylike she appears even in her common working-dress?"

"She looks very much like a lady; I should think, though, that a girl of her attractions would be more inclined to dress herself up and play the fine lady than to stick steady to her work," the deacon said, thoughtfully.

"I haven't a better hand in the mill, deacon," White replied, decidedly. "I wish all the rest were as good."

"Pretty nice girl, eh?"

"Yes, as far as my knowledge of her goes."

The two walked on, the deacon taking a careful parting glance at Lydia.

They made the circuit of the room, then returned to the office.

Hardly had the two got out of sight when the girl who worked next to Lydia came over to her.

"I wonder what he wanted up here," she said, with a sly glance at Lydia.

"Who?"

"Why the old gentleman with Mr. White."

"To look at the machinery, I suppose," Lydia answered, with perfect unconcern.

"He's been through the mill often enough; he knows all about the machinery," the girl said, with a toss of her head.

"I never saw him here before," Lydia replied.

"Why, don't you know who he is?"

"The old gentleman, you mean?" Lydia asked, wondering at the question.

"Yes, of course."

"No, I do not know him; how should I?" she said, in some little astonishment. Lydia could not understand the drift of the girl's questions, nor why she should take any interest in the visit of the old gentleman.

"Why, that was Deacon Paxton, Sinclair Paxton's father."

Lydia gave just a little bit of a start. She had noticed that the old gentleman had looked at her very intently, but she had thought that he was only watching the process of her work.

"That was Sinclair Paxton's father," the girl repeated, a little disappointed that the news had produced so little impression upon Lydia. She had seen Lydia walking with Sinclair two nights before.

"Ah, yes," Lydia said, affecting an air of unconcern which she was far from feeling.

"It is strange that the deacon should take the trouble to come up here; one would think that he wanted to see somebody," and with this parting shot the young lady returned to her work, and Lydia put the question to herself:

"Did his father come to see me?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEACON'S VISIT.

THE day's work was over, and Lydia sat in the little parlor of her boarding-house. She had laid aside her working-dress and was attired in a fleecy muslin, very plain and very neat. A little knot of flame-colored ribbon at the neck was the sole ornament.

Ever since the discovery that the old gentleman who had bestowed such a sharp glance upon her was Sinclair's father, she had thought of nothing else.

A dozen times she had put the question to herself:

"Did he come to the mill to see me?"

Something within whispered her that he did. From the remarks of the girl who had called her attention to Deacon Paxton, it was plainly apparent to her that the intimacy existing between herself and Sinclair had been noticed and commented upon. This did not astonish Lydia in the least; for she had learned long before that the good folks of Biddeford and Saco dearly loved to gossip. And that the wealthy Sinclair Paxton, the treasurer of the mill, should be paying attentions to one of the mill-hands, a poor girl depending upon her labor for support, was quite sufficient to create considerable talk.

The gloom of the twilight was slowly descending. Lydia was listlessly gazing out of the window into the little garden, watching a half-blown rose as it swayed gently to and fro in the evening breeze, when she was suddenly startled by hearing her name pronounced and by a voice strange to her ears.

She looked up, and by the garden gate stood the old gentleman she had seen in the mill that morning, Deacon Edmund Paxton.

"Miss Grame, I believe?" the deacon had said, in his bland, smooth way.

"Yes," the girl replied, startled at the apparition.

"Excuse my coming in, but I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you," and the deacon opened the gate and advanced up the pathway toward the house.

Lydia's suspicions were now confirmed; the old gentleman had come to the mill that morning to see her.

Almost bewildered, and guessing vaguely at the reason of the unexpected visit, Lydia hastened to open the front door and admit the old gentleman.

He walked at once into the parlor.

"You see, Miss Grame, I make myself perfectly at home," he said, smilingly, as he seated himself in the rocking-chair.

"I am sure that you are quite welcome, sir," the girl hastened to say.

"Be seated, my dear; I have come to have quite a long conversation with you," the deacon said, in a fatherly way.

Silently the girl complied.

"I saw you this morning in the mill," he began. "I suppose, though, that I ought to begin by introducing myself, as I am a stranger to you. My name is Paxton, Edmund Paxton; the name is probably familiar to you; my son, Sinclair, is the treasurer of the mill where you are employed."

"Yes, sir, I am acquainted with him," Lydia said, slowly.

Although the manner of the deacon was extremely cordial, yet the girl felt a painful apprehension that the nature of his errand was unpleasant.

"Ah—yes; by the way, Miss Grame, your name is not familiar to me; are you a native of the State of Maine?"

"No, sir; I was born in Virginia."

"Ah, a Southerner, eh? Well, how do you like New England? Does it agree with you?"

"Oh, yes; I am very happy and contented here," she answered.

"I'm glad of that; I always like to have every one happy. I presume, then, that you have no relatives here?"

"No, sir."

"It is our good old New England fashion, you know, for the folks to call upon all strangers who honor their neighborhood with a visit, and as I had an idea that you were a stranger among us I thought that it was my duty to call upon you. I'm aware that the custom is getting out of fashion now. We're all so taken up in our hurry to get rich that we are forgetting the simple manners and kindly habits of our forefathers. Are your parents living, Miss Grame?"

"No, sir."

"All alone in the world, eh?"

"Yes; I haven't even a living relative that I know of," the girl said, sadly.

"Bless me, that's very bad indeed—a young girl like you and no relatives to guide or counsel?"

"None!"

"Well, well," the deacon said, reflectively. "I'm very glad, my dear, that I called upon you. While you remain with us you must look upon me as a friend. Any time that you need counsel or assistance, come to me, and you shall certainly have it."

Tears sparkled in the dark eyes of the girl at the friendly words of Deacon Paxton.

He, watching her narrowly, while pretending not to do so, saw the evidence of emotion, though she hastily turned aside her head and brushed the tears away.

The deacon was rather pleased with the effect of his words.

"I am sure you are very kind," the girl said, her voice trembling with emotion, despite her efforts to appear composed.

"Well, my child, how do people treat you up here? Do you get along pretty well, eh?"

"Yes, sir; every one is very kind to me."

"Mr. White speaks of you very highly indeed."

"I have tried very hard to give satisfaction," she said, earnestly.

"He tells me that you are a great worker."

"I do the best I can, sir," was the modest reply.

"I suppose you have some bright '*chateau en Espagne*' before you—some dream of a cozy home and a husband's love to cheer you up when your fingers get tired and your back weary?" the deacon said, carelessly, but he kept his eyes intently fixed on the face of the girl.

A little bright spot of color came into the white cheeks as the words fell upon her ears, and she hesitated a moment before she made reply.

"No, sir," she said, slowly.

"What! Is it possible that a young lady as pretty and attractive as yourself doesn't think of marrying and of settling down to cheer some poor fellow's heart and make him think his home is an earthly paradise?"

"I do not think of marrying, sir," she said, with downcast eyes and the tinge of color glowing brightly in her smooth cheeks.

"By the way, Miss Grame, have you any enemies in Biddeford?" the deacon asked, suddenly.

Lydia looked astonished at the question.

"None that I am aware of, sir," she replied.

"I asked because I received a note this morning which evidently didn't come from any friend of yours. Read it," and the deacon handed Lydia the brief note written in the disguised hand.

The face of the girl flushed up red as fire as she read the communication.

"You see that doesn't come from any friend of yours," the deacon said, meaningly.

"I will not deny, sir, that I know your son—that he sometimes visits me, and that we have walked out together; but that there is any engagement between us is a falsehood. I hope you believe me, sir?" and Lydia looked earnestly into the face of the deacon.

"My dear, don't run on so fast," the old gentleman said, good-humoredly, as he took back the note. "I haven't come to put you on the rack and cross-question you in regard to your intimacy with my son. Of course it was only natural, when I received this delicate warning, that I should wish to see what sort of a person Miss Lydia Grame was. That is the reason why I have taken the liberty to call upon you and make your acquaintance this evening."

"But you do not believe that the warning is true, sir?" Lydia asked, anxiously.

"My dear, it doesn't make any difference to me whether it is so or not. I don't ask you to say either yes or no. If my son has chosen to fall in love with you, all that I have to say is that he has shown himself possessed of remarkably good taste."

"Then if your son should like me, he would not incur your displeasure by so doing?" Lydia asked, blushing just a little at the complimentary speech of the deacon.

"He is old enough, my dear, to both think and act for himself, and I should be the last person in the world to interfere in the matter, unless he chose to come and ask my advice; then I should give it to him, more as a friend than a father. Of course I should naturally ask some few questions as to who and what his intended bride was, her family, etc.; which could be easily answered."

The color faded from Lydia's face, and she seemed confused. The deacon did not fail to notice the change.

"I'll bid you good-evening, my dear, now," he said, rising and taking his hat from the table. "Remember, if you need any advice, come to me and you shall have it freely."

"Believe me, sir, there is nothing in this report," she said, anxiously; "at least, not on my side."

"If my son loves you, and you would make him a good wife—which from what little I know of you, looks probable—I trust that there may be some little love on your side, one of these days. Good-night," and the deacon departed, leaving Lydia a prey to conflicting emotions.

"But I do not love him!" she exclaimed, standing by the door, gazing out into the dusk of the twilight, and communing with herself.

"I feel sure that I do not love him, yet he is so worthy to be loved!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ADVENTURER AGAIN.

LYDIA stood by the doorway like one in a trance, her eyes were fixed upon the ground and rapidly the busy thoughts flashed across her brain.

"He is so worthy to be loved," she repeated, slowly, "and yet I am sure I do not love him. Oh, there isn't any one in this world who could guess how strangely fascinating he is, and yet—I feel that I do not love him. But will the time ever come when I shall love him? No, no, no!" she cried, hurriedly; "I must not think of that; I must not even dream of such happiness being in store for me. I must be on my guard against him, or some day I may wake to the knowledge that I do love him, and then there will be nothing but misery for me hereafter in this world. It must not—it shall not be!" and the girl shut her white teeth firmly together, and over her face came a hard and cruel look. For the moment she looked ten years older.

"Ah, Lydia, enjoying the breezes of the night?" said a well-known voice. The speaker had approached so softly that the girl, deep in thought, had not heard his footsteps. Lydia's face plainly showed the pain she felt, for the speaker was Daisy Brick.

Brick opened the gate and came into the garden. Lydia had not moved, but stood like a statue in the doorway.

"What a deuced strange girl you are!" Daisy exclaimed, as he came up to her. "You don't even say 'How d'ye do' to a fellow."

"Why have you come here again?" demanded the girl, suddenly, and her eyes glared, and the big veins in her white temples swelled out like knotted cords.

"Are you going crazy?" demanded Brick, in astonishment.

"Why have you come here again?" repeated the girl, her voice forced and unnatural.

"To see you, of course, since you insist upon an answer," he replied.

"Will you ever leave me in peace?" the girl exclaimed, despair plainly written on her white face.

"Who the deuce wants to disturb you?" ejaculated Brick, disdainfully. "It's a great pity, I think, if I can't come and have a quiet chat with you once in awhile, without your kicking up such a row about it."

"What do you want now?" the girl asked, plaintively.

"Don't want anything in particular," Brick replied, shortly.

"I can't give you any more money—"

"Wait till I ask you for it," he interrupted, quickly.

"Oh, go away!" she exclaimed.

"Shan't do any thing of the sort, and don't you be a fool. I don't intend to do you any harm. You'll see before long that I'm the best friend you ever had."

"You a friend?" Lydia exclaimed, in a tone of withering contempt.

Even the redoubtable Daisy winced at it. He was not utterly without feeling.

"See here, don't you be so confounded sarcastic!" he exclaimed. "You cut right through a fellow with that icy tone of yours, just like a north-east wind. Why, Lydia, you make me feel quite uncomfortable; you don't say much, but your manner suggests a good deal, and I am so quick of apprehension, that, really, I would greatly prefer that you would speak in a more pleasant manner."

"I don't wish to see you at all," she exclaimed, quickly. "You know very well that your presence brings nothing but pain to me."

"Lydia, my charmer, it's our duty in this life of ours, to bear pain sometimes," he said, lightly; "but you take a wrong idea of this matter. You are here all alone, a stranger among strangers; so am I. Being old acquaint-

ances, it is only natural that we should come together for mutual advice and counsel, say. And from what I have heard from the village gossips, I rather think that you will need the advice of a cool, clear-headed friend before long."

Daisy's manner implied a great deal more than his words.

"What have you heard?" Lydia demanded, suddenly, the vivid scarlet spots burning in her cheeks.

"That a certain gentleman is very much in love with you, and that you are very much in love with him, and the first letter of his name is Sinclair," Brick exclaimed, jocosely.

"I cannot keep people from talking," Lydia said, slowly.

"Who wants you to?" Brick cried, in amazement. "Let 'em talk—does 'em good. Now, my dear, I've come to give you some good advice; so let us go into the house where we can sit down and talk quietly and calmly."

"I do not want your advice!" the girl cried, hotly.

"But you must have it, my dear high-spirited angel," Brick replied, placidly. "Come!" And he mounted the step and attempted to place his arm around the girl's waist, but she shrunk from him as though there was death in his touch.

"Oh, I ain't a snake!" Brick exclaimed, rather out of temper. "I'm not going to bite you; you needn't jump as though your precious life was in danger."

"I can not bear to have you touch me," she said, in a tone of aversion.

"Oh, indeed! Well, now, I never should have guessed that, if you hadn't said so!" Brick exclaimed, with profound sarcasm.

Then, a little out of humor, he walked into the parlor, and Lydia followed slowly.

Brick took possession of the rocking-chair, with an air of intense satisfaction.

"They may say what they like about New England; the people down here know how to live and enjoy life," he exclaimed, in a confident tone. "I've made up my mind to stop in these parts for some little time, and so I hunted up a boarding-house, and what the old woman who keeps it, Mrs. Sparks, don't know about cooking, ain't worth knowing."

Lydia's heart sunk within her at his words. She had tried to forget him and his visit, and had fondly imagined that she would not be haunted by his presence.

"By the way, Lydia, my dear, you may as well light a lamp, if there is one in the room; I hate to talk in the dark," he said.

Lydia did not reply, but lit the lamp, which stood on the mantelpiece.

"And, now, sit down, my dear," Brick continued—the girl was leaning on the mantelpiece—"it looks so awkward to see you standing there."

She went quietly, and seated herself in the nearest chair.

"There, that's better!" he exclaimed, with an air of satisfaction. "Now we can have a cozy chat together. A moment since you wounded me greatly. You insinuated that I had come to get some money from you. My dear Lydia, how could you wrong me so?" and Daisy shook his head, mournfully. "True, I did borrow a small sum from you on the occasion of my last visit, but, as I explained to you at the time, I was under a cloud; that cloud has now lifted. I am now in business on my own account, thanks to the loan received from you."

Lydia looked a little bewildered; during her acquaintance with Daisy Brick, she had never known him to exhibit any business qualifications whatever.

"By the way, if any one should happen to see me in conversation with you at any time, my name might be asked. I am known here as Daisy Brick. I am not sailing under false colors at present, for, odd as it may appear to you, that peculiar appellation is really my name."

"What can it possibly matter to me?" Lydia said, with an air of weariness.

"Oh, nothing, of course, for I suppose that the feelings which once animated your breast for Lord Alfred Vere de Vere are dead and gone?"

"Can you ask that question?" the girl said, slowly.

"There was hardly a need of it, but still it is as well that we should understand each other. When first we became acquainted you were under the impression that I was an English lord of high descent and unlimited wealth; now the truth is that I was born in a poor-house—a pauper by birth, and a thief by breeding. You

once had an idea that I was going to bestow on you an unlimited amount of wealth. That idea proved to be a delusion only, but, now, I doubt not that you will look upon me with amazement, when I tell you that I have a scheme in my head which will make your fortune. You are poor, and work hard all day long in a dingy mill for just enough to live on. You shall be rich, ride in your carriage, enjoy all that wealth can purchase."

"Do you ever read the Bible?" asked the girl, suddenly.

Daisy looked thoroughly astonished at the question.

"Well, I can't say that I do read it much, now," he replied. "But what has that to do with us, I should like to know?"

"One passage reads, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!'"

Daisy winced, for the shot struck home.

"You are extremely complimentary, my dear," he said, a little annoyed.

"Only the truth."

"The truth should not be spoken at all times."

"An evil saying used by evil men for bad purposes!" she exclaimed.

"You think, then, that like the Prince of Darkness, I am promising what I cannot perform, when I tell you that I can give you wealth? You see, I do remember something of the Book."

"You may be able to do what you say, but I fear that the price will be a terrible one."

"Oh, no! it will be extremely cheap; only to marry the man you love."

Lydia looked at him with a piercing glance.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRICK "RISES" TO EXPLAIN.

"Now don't look at me in that way with your great eyes almost popping out of your head; I am speaking soberly and in downright earnest. Fortune is before you, if you will only choose to grasp it," Brick said, just a little uneasy under the piercing glance of Lydia.

The girl made no reply.

Daisy looked at her for a moment as if uncertain how to act.

"By the way," he said, abruptly, "I told you that I had gone into business. Are you not curious about the matter?"

"I do not believe you," the girl said, frankly.

"By Jove! how extremely unpleasant you are in your remarks this evening! You must be out of temper at something."

"I have seen you," the girl replied.

Daisy winced again and shut his teeth together tightly for a moment.

"You are in a terrible mood to-night," he said, endeavoring to conceal his annoyance. "Well now, for once in your life you wrong me. It is really the truth that I am deeply engaged in commercial affairs. I told you at our last interview that I preferred to receive money from the great world rather than from you; you must own that there is just a touch of honor about me, bad as I am. With the money I received from you I proceeded to lay the snares to catch the human birds known commonly as gulls. You may remember that I always said that a man of wits could live well by simply trading upon the weaknesses of his fellow-men. To illustrate: a man of brains discovers some important secrets that the men without brains pay him well to disclose to them. This is the idea at the bottom of all patents, you know."

The girl looked at him with a countenance whereon unbelief was strongly impressed.

"In fact, I suppose I could claim to be an inventor," he said.

"And what have you invented?" she asked, incredulously.

"Listen," and Daisy drew a folded paper from his pocket-book, and opening it, read aloud:

"IMPORTANT TO FARMERS AND OTHERS.—How to keep wells from freezing in the coldest weather. Full particulars sent by mail for 50 cents. Address Benjamin Franklin, Saco, Maine."

Then Daisy looked at Lydia and smiled.

"You see what an important discovery I have made. Where the men who wouldn't give fifty cents to keep his well from freezing up."

"And do you really know a way to prevent it?" the girl asked, doubtfully.

"Certainly. When I receive the fifty cents, I send back the directions; they are very short and quite plain. When the weather threatens to be cold, take in your well and place it by the kitchen fire."

"But that is impossible!" the girl exclaimed.

"Ah, I don't agree to keep the wells from freezing; only tell them how," Brick said, unblushingly.

"A trick, and like you," the girl said, quietly.

"Yes, I flatter myself that it isn't every one who has the brains to get up so neat a dodge," Brick said, complacently. "Now, here's Number Two." And he unfolded another paper.

"How not to lose at cards, dice, or any other game of chance; worth a thousand dollars to any man. Send twenty-five cents by mail to James Gray, Biddeford, Maine."

"Now this is really no humbug; this is truth," Brick explained.

"And the answer?"

"Never play at any game of chance," and Daisy caressed his chin, smilingly.

Lydia's face plainly showed the contempt she felt.

"I calculate—as a down-easter would say—that these two little advertisements will bring me in about ten dollars a week clear profit. It's very handy, these two towns being so near together. It gives me two post-offices, and it will be some time before the folks will suspect my little game. Then, when these simple and yet ingenious devices are worn threadbare, I'll have a dozen others just as taking. Lydia, my dear, until you have gone into this sort of business you never will have any idea what a large amount of idiots there are walking around in this world, pretending to be perfectly sane."

"The police may interfere with your occupation."

"Very little danger of that. The men who get sold on such things generally have sense enough to keep their folly to themselves. They only lose a trifle; besides, I don't operate anywhere near the post-office address. The advertisements go to newspapers located in far-off States, and the gulls seldom make any fuss about the sell. It's a light, genteel business, and one that suits me to a hair," Brick said, in a easy, airy way.

The look of contempt which appeared on the face of the girl clearly expressed her opinion of Daisy Brick's clever devices.

"And now, to return to the subject about which I came especially to speak. Do you want to be wealthy—to be forever above want and care?"

"Not through any means which you can offer," Lydia replied, firmly.

"Oh, nonsense!" Brick cried, impatiently; "what matters the means as long as the end is attained? But I will rise to explain. This Sinclair Paxton is madly in love with you."

Lydia rose suddenly to her feet and looked down upon Brick with a face as white and as colorless as a marble statue.

"Now don't be a fool!" he exclaimed—he saw danger written plainly on the girl's face—"and listen to what I have got to say. This Paxton is rich—or at least his father is, and Sinclair is his heir. He will marry you if you play your cards rightly, and I can advise you in regard to that."

"Why do you wish me to marry him?" the girl asked, slowly, and with a face like marble.

"Well—I would like to see you settled comfortably in the world, and—" Brick hesitated.

"And because you would play the leech's part; by the hold that you have on me you would wring money from him. You would make me steal my husband's money to buy your silence!" the girl cried, indignantly.

"Hush! not so loud!" exclaimed Brick, in alarm.

"Oh, do not fear; we are all alone in the house, though I should care very little if all the world heard my words," Lydia said, bitterly.

"My dear, don't run away with these foolish ideas," Brick said, soothingly. "I am only acting for your good. Confound it, do you think that I haven't got any blood in my veins? Do you suppose that it isn't any sacrifice for me to give you up to this man? Of course I intend to be paid for it. Not that I'm going to act like a leech, though, as you suggest. I want a certain sum of money, and then I'll go away, and you'll never see me again. I'll give you any assurance in the world that you can suggest; I don't care what it is. I am really acting honestly in this matter. I have thought it over carefully. It was quite a struggle before I could bring myself to consent to leave you forever. Come, I should think that you would jump at the chance to marry the man you love."

"How do you know that I love him?" Lydia demanded.

"Well, I judge so from what I have heard and seen. I saw you when you were walking

with him the other night. Now don't be foolish; such another chance as this may never come to you in all your life. Never mind the past; don't think of that at all. You and I are the only ones that know it. I shall never speak if you do as I say. Marry this Paxton, pay me a thousand dollars within a year after your marriage, and I'll engage never to trouble you again."

"You would have me wed this man with a lie on my lips?" the girl demanded, bitterly.

"You need not speak at all; I'll do all the lying that is necessary in the affair," Brick said, coolly. "All you will have to do is to keep quiet and look happy. Of course the Paxton folks will want to know something about your family. I'll attend to that, and also to your past life. I shall only have to tell the truth, suppressing some few trifling particulars which really are neither here nor there."

"Oh, what a base part you would have me play!" the girl exclaimed.

"Not at all! What is your past life to them, or to Sinclair, for that matter? You'll make him a good wife, I know, and that is all he wants."

"I would sooner die than become his wife!" Lydia cried, almost fiercely. "I do not love him, but I respect him too much to deceive him, and from this time forth I shall strive to do all in my power to cure him of any affection that he may have for me. He may think me fickle and weak-minded, but base or false he never shall find me. Now, you can do your worst; you can speak out, and tell everybody who and what I am; I care but little, but deceive him I will not. I am bound fast enough now to you; by marrying him I should make myself, indeed, your slave."

"Lydia, I trust that you will change your mind," Brick said, rising, and in not the best humor in the world.

"Never, never!" cried the girl, decidedly.

"I'll see you again in three or four days; think it over," and, with this parting injunction, Brick left the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STONE QUARRY.

BRICK walked out of the house into the street. In reality he was inflamed with rage, although he appeared quiet and calm.

"Of all fools in this world there's no fool like a woman when she is a fool!" he muttered, savagely, as he strode along at quite a high rate of speed for him. "There's a clean thousand dollars in this business, just as easy as turning my hand over, if she would only do as I want her to; but there's the rub. In the temper she is in now I might as well attempt to turn the Saco river from its course by whistling at it as to either persuade or force her to do as I want her to. There never was a woman yet who could comprehend the meaning of the word, reason. It is an enigma to them. They are solely and purely creatures of impulse. There is no earthly use in trying to reason with one of them. The more you talk, the less they understand."

Brick by this time had come to the corner of the street, and hesitated for a moment, as if uncertain which way to direct his steps. As he stood under the shadows of a large elm he suddenly became conscious that a man had followed him up the street and was rapidly approaching him.

Brick gave no particular heed to this, but the man came directly on and halted opposite to him instead of passing up the street.

Brick looked at the stranger, and the stranger looked at him; and Brick, at the first glance, set the stranger down as being under the influence of liquor.

"You're the man I want to see," said the stranger, hoarsely.

"Excuse me; I really believe that you have the advantage of me," Brick said, blandly.

"My name is Hollis—Jediel Hollis."

Brick instantly remembered the name. He had not forgotten the conversation he had had with the grocery clerk, Gardner, in regard to the pretty mill-girl, Lydia, and her suitors.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Hollis, the carpenter, I believe?" Brick said, wondering what on earth he wanted with him.

"You know Miss Grame, don't you?" Hollis asked.

"Yes, I have the pleasure of her acquaintance."

"I've got something very particular to say to you about her."

Brick looked at Hollis in amazement. He couldn't understand what that something could be.

"If you have half an hour to spare, I'd like to have a little conversation with you about her."

"Well, in what particular way?" Brick, with all his acuteness, was puzzled.

"I can't explain here," the carpenter said, hurriedly; "besides we are liable to be overheard; folks are passing by us constantly."

"Is it something particular?"

"Yes, very particular."

"Very well; I'm at your service, then."

Brick's curiosity was excited.

"I know a nice quiet place, where we can talk without danger of being overheard," Hollis said; "it's a stone quarry, just outside the town. The moon is coming up, so that we will have plenty of light."

"Let's be going, then."

And they proceeded onward. Ten minutes' walk carried them out of the shaded street into the rays of the rising moon.

"Have a cigar?" Hollis said, halting suddenly, and taking a couple from his pocket.

"Thank you, yes."

Then for the first time, Brick got a good view of Hollis's face. He saw that it was as pale as death, and that there were great dark circles around the bloodshot eyes; and he noticed, as he offered the lighted match, that Hollis's hand trembled like an aspen leaf.

"He'll have an attack of the jim-jams soon," Brick muttered to himself.

Then the two proceeded onward without further halt until the stone quarry was reached.

"Let us go up and sit on the rocks; we'll have the breeze up there," Hollis suggested.

Brick was nothing loth, and the two climbed up the narrow path until they reached the summit of the rocks, and there they sat down.

Before them was the circular excavation of the quarry; behind them the open country, rough and sterile, and patched here and there with stunted trees, while bushes stretched down toward the far-off ocean, the beating of whose surf against the shore could almost be heard from the quarry's heights.

"Now we can talk without danger of being overheard," Hollis said, and his first act after sitting down was to fling his only half-consumed cigar down into the depths of the quarry.

Brick watched the action with astonishment; for the first time the thought came into his mind that possibly he had done a foolish thing in trusting himself in such a desolate place with a man evidently under the influence of liquor, and who seemed to be a little unsettled in the upper story.

"You know Lydia Grame?" Hollis exclaimed, suddenly.

"Yes," Brick replied.

"What do you know of her? Where did you know her?"

The questions were roughly and coarsely put, and Brick rather resented the tone.

"In Virginia," he said, shortly.

"You know all about her?"

"Oh, no; only a slight acquaintance," Brick replied, carelessly.

"You lie! you do know all about her!" Hollis cried, fiercely.

"See here, my friend, I don't allow that sort of thing," Brick said, with much dignity, rising, as if to depart. But, before he could move a step, Hollis jumped up, and, without saying a word, grabbed Brick by the throat, and set him down again upon the stone with such violence that it brought the tears to his eyes.

For a moment Brick gazed at Hollis, stupefied. Daisy was wiry and muscular, slight as he appeared to be in figure, but he had found that he was no match for the strong-limbed carpenter.

"Sit down!" cried Hollis, fiercely; "I brought you here to talk to you. I know that you know all about this girl. I was hiding in the garden, and heard about all of your conversation. The moment darkness comes, I watch that house now. Don't you ever advise her to marry Sinclair Paxton again; if you do, and I find it out, I'll strangle you with as little remorse as I would crush the life out of a worm."

Brick looked for a moment into the glaring eyes of the half-crazy carpenter, and fully realized that, to use the popular expression, he was in a tight place. He hadn't the least idea how to proceed to soothe the enraged lover, and so wisely concluded to hold his peace.

"You have some power over this woman; you know some secret concerning her. Now, then, I want you to tell me what that secret is."

Brick looked at Hollis for a moment, and into the eyes of the cool and calculating Daisy came a look of utter despair.

"My dear sir, I really—" he stammered, in utter confusion.

"Don't attempt to lie to me!" Hollis cried, in a rage. "I tell you I heard every word that passed between you and Lydia Grame to-night. She doesn't love Sinclair Paxton, she doesn't love you, but she in some way is in your power. She must be in mine. I'll give you a minute to speak!"

And Hollis approached Brick, grasped him in his strong arms and raised him to his feet.

"I can't tell you!" Brick exclaimed, struggling in vain to escape from the iron-like gripe of the carpenter.

"You must, or I'll throw you headlong down into the quarry!" Hollis cried, dragging Brick toward the edge.

"Mercy! mercy!" Brick gasped, in horror.

"Speak, or down you go!"

Little hope was there of mercy from the mad-dened lover.

Hollis held Brick on the brink.

"I'll tell you on one condition," Brick gasped.

"All right."

Hollis put Brick back on the stone where he had sat, and then resumed his former position.

"Now, it is only fair that you should pay me something for this information," Brick said. He thought of a plan of escape.

"Yes, that's fair," Hollis assented.

"And before you can use the information you must have certain papers which I have in my room in Biddeford. Suppose you meet me here to-morrow night?"

"You are deceiving me!" Hollis cried. "I've half a mind to throw you over, anyway," and he rose in menace.

"You'll never gain the secret then!" Brick said, in alarm.

"That's true," and Hollis paused. "How much do you want?"

"Well, say a hundred dollars."

"All right; to-morrow night, here?"

"Yes."

Then the two descended to the road, the cold perspiration standing on Daisy's forehead.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SACO'S CURSE.

It was after supper, and Deacon Paxton sat in his library, deeply engrossed in the Boston newspaper.

There was a gentle knock at the door, and Sinclair entered. A grave look was on his face—a look which had a tinge of anxiety in it.

"Are you busy, father?" he asked, respectfully.

"No, only looking at the *Advertiser*; any thing to say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down, then," and the deacon motioned to a chair.

Sinclair seated himself.

"You made a visit down-town this evening, father?" he said, a little constraint plainly evident in his manner.

"Yes," the deacon looked a little surprised.

"I was told so by a party who saw you coming from the house."

"Sinclair, I think some of these Biddeford folks would make excellent detective officers," the deacon said, shrewdly.

"I hope, father, you do not blame me for not having spoken of the affair?"

"Oh, no; and on your part, I trust that you will not think that I was trying to pry into your private affairs?"

"No, I know you too well for that."

"This will explain to you why I took any action in the matter," and the deacon took the anonymous letter from a pigeon-hole in his secretary, and handed it to his son.

Sinclair read the letter over carefully.

"It is in a woman's hand, and evidently disguised," he said.

"Yes, I formed the same opinion. Is the hand at all familiar to you?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any idea as to the writer?"

"None in the least, sir."

"Is there any young lady in Biddeford to whom you have been paying attentions, before you met this Miss Grame?"

"No, sir."

"I thought if there had been anything of that kind going on, that it might explain the reason why the letter was sent. Of course it was done to make mischief; that is apparent enough."

"I hope the design has not succeeded, sir?" Sinclair said, just a shade of anxiety in his manner.

"A total failure, as far as I am concerned, Sinclair. I own it rather excited my Yankee

curiosity, though, and I made up my mind to see what the young lady was like."

"And may I ask what opinion you formed in regard to her, sir?"

"I was very favorably impressed, Sinclair. She is very much of a lady, and White says there isn't a girl in the mill who attends to her work better."

"I can fully confirm Mr. White's assurance in regard to that matter, from what I know of the pay-roll," Sinclair added.

"Well, Sinclair, has it really gone as far as this letter implies?" the father asked.

"No, sir," Sinclair responded, quickly. "I own I have paid the lady in question some attentions, and do think a great deal of her; but there is no engagement between us, and I don't know as I am really justified in calling it a love affair."

"The young lady told me as much. I had quite a pleasant chat with her."

"Then I suppose if the lady and I make up our minds that we do care for one another, we may hope the union will not be without your sanction?"

"From what I know of the lady I can see no reason to object. Both are old enough to know your own minds and to act for yourselves. I frankly confess, Sinclair, that I would have preferred to have had you marry the daughter of some of the old families about us; but, perhaps, it is as well, if not better, that a little fresh blood should be infused into the old New England strain. But do you know any thing about her family?"

"Very little, sir; I have never questioned her. In fact, father, the affair has not gone far enough yet for me to proceed to that length. I know that she is only a poor girl, but that makes very little difference in my estimation."

"None at all!" the deacon exclaimed, quickly. "A man marries a woman, not a money-bag. The cardinal point is to consider whether she is suited to you or not, and whether she will make you a good wife."

"Marriage is a lottery, you know, father."

"Yes, yes—terrible lot of blanks, my son, and very few prizes. As a general rule our family have not been lucky with their wives."

"So I have heard, father. I remember that aunt Jane used to hint mysteriously at some terrible curse hanging over our family, dating way back to the old Indian days."

"Yes, there is quite a legend. I suppose you ought to know it, as you are thinking about getting married; my father told it to me just before my marriage."

"Do you believe in it, father?" Sinclair asked, with a smile.

"My son, never doubt an old family legend, or you'll ruin the reputation of the house forever," the deacon said, laughing. "Legends are sacred things, you know, to be handed down from father to son, like old family plate. I am sorry to say, though, that the story doesn't put one of our ancestors in the best possible light. But you shall judge for yourself. The legend commences just after the founding of the Saco colony. One of the first cabins put up here was built by our ancestor, Colonel Israel Paxton. Tradition says that it stood on precisely the same spot where this mansion now stands. The settlers lived in almost constant warfare with the Indians of the Saco tribe. Finally the great chief of the Wampanoags of Rhode Island, Metamora, or King Philip, as the whites termed him, formed a great Indian confederacy, intended to drive the whites into the ocean. Philip's defeat and death broke the power of the Indians forever. The Sacos, who formed part of the confederacy, suffered severely; only a small part of the tribe ever came back to the river, and they pitched their village some fifty miles up the stream, in what is now the town of Hiram. But, weak as the tribe was, it was still a source of considerable annoyance to the settlers at the mouth of the river."

"Our ancestor, the colonel, was one of the volunteers who had marched to Boston and helped to destroy the power of King Philip. After he returned to Saco, by some chance he became acquainted with an Indian girl—called after the fanciful fashion of the savages—Little Leaf. She was the daughter of Kennebunk, the great chief of the Saco tribe. The colonel, much to the astonishment of the colonists—for he was a straight-laced, God-fearing man—married the Indian girl. This marriage should have cemented a peace between the whites and the Indians, but, so far from doing so, some six months after the wedding, the Indian wife led a party of the colonists, headed by our ancestor, the colonel, to the retreat of the red-men, and nearly all of the tribe were butchered in the

fight. The few who escaped found shelter with the far-off tribes to the north, and never more with arms in their hands menaced the Saco colony."

"Our ancestor, the colonel, received a large grant of land for his services; but the deed of treachery, by means of which nearly all of her kindred had fallen, weighed heavily on the soul of the Indian girl, and three months after the date of the slaughter she died in child-birth, invoking the most horrid curses upon the head of her husband and predicting that the curse of the wronged red-man would cling unto the family of the Paxtons until the blood of the Indian should again mingle with their life-stream."

"But this curse, father, has not been fulfilled; no fatality has ever attended our family."

"Well, yes, there has been a something which seemed like a fulfillment of the 'Saco's curse,' as the family legend calls it," the deacon said, slowly.

"In what way?"

"The Indian wife died in giving birth to a son, and, from that day to this, with but one exception, all the Paxton wives have had but one child, a son, and have died in giving birth to that child."

"Well, that certainly is very strange, father!" Sinclair said, thoughtfully.

"It really seems as if there was some truth in the old legend after all, doesn't it?"

"Yes; but you said there had been an exception."

"Yes, my father's wife, your grandmother. Her first child was a girl—your aunt Jane, but your grandmother died soon after my birth. All these particulars were related to me by my father just before my marriage. Of course I did not believe in the legendary story and married without giving it a thought. But your birth cost your mother her life, and, for the first time, I began to believe that possibly there might be some little truth in the assertion that the Saco's curse was clinging to our family."

"And the only way to remove the spell is for one of the Paxtons to marry an Indian girl?" Sinclair said, thoughtfully.

"So runs the legend."

"But, father, did any of our family ever marry a second wife after the first one died?"

"No; I believe that has never occurred. That might break the spell. I've half a mind to try that myself," the deacon said, laughing.

"I do not think the Saco's curse will keep me from marrying if I find a girl I like," Sinclair said.

"Oh, it is probably only accident, after all."

Sinclair departed, fully satisfied of his father's consent.

CHAPTER XIX.

WIDOW GARDNER.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Elmira Gardner, more commonly called widow Gardner, the mother of the grocery clerk, Jerry, and the woman with whom Lydia Grame boarded, had made all needful preparations for supper, and had sat down in the rocking-chair to enjoy a few minutes' rest.

The widow was a brisk, plump little woman, wearing her age remarkably well; as busy as a bee and as neat as wax. Biddeford folks said that there wasn't a better housekeeper in the State of Maine than Elmira Gardner.

The widow had opened the blinds, which had been carefully closed to keep out the sun, and, with an expression of placid contentment upon her face, was enjoying the cool breeze which swept over the town.

Suddenly her eyes caught sight of a young lady tripping up the street.

"My!" she exclaimed, "if there ain't Delia Embden!"

And great was the widow's astonishment when the girl came directly to the house and opened the garden-gate, evidently intending to make a call.

"How do you do, Mrs. Gardner?" Delia said; "I've come to make a call."

"Come right in, Delia!" exclaimed the widow, hastening to throw open the front door.

She escorted the girl into the parlor, and pressed her to lay aside her things, which Delia preferred not to do, saying that she was only going to stop a few minutes.

"I s'pose, Mrs. Gardner, that you had about come to the conclusion that I had forgotten all my old friends?" the girl said.

"Well, to tell the truth, you hain't been to see me for a long time, but I s'posed that you were busy. It's a good deal of work to take care of a big house like yours up on the hill, and I don't s'pose that you have any more time

than you know what to do with," the widow replied.

The widow had been just a little bit put out because Delia had not called upon her lately. In the old time the Gardners and the Embdens had been very intimate, but since the skipper of the Nancy Jane had become wealthy, a sort of coldness had sprung up between the two families. Three or four years before, the village gossips had broadly hinted that it was likely that Jerry Gardner and Delia Embden would make a match, but, when Daddy Embden made such a display of wealth, all imagined that Jerry, who was only a clerk in a grocery store, stood very little chance of winning the wealthy heiress.

"Yes, the care of the house does keep me pretty busy; and then, father, too, hasn't been well for nearly four months now."

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed the widow, in astonishment. "Why, I never heard any one say any thing about your father being sick."

"Well, he's not so sick as to need a doctor, but still he needs a good deal of looking after," Delia explained.

"You're looking real well, Delia."

"Oh, yes, I'm always well."

"Well, now, you're a good deal like me. I do declare I hain't been sick for I don't know when. And I work pretty smart, too. I s'pose you know that I've got a boarder, and that always makes more work."

"Yes, a Miss Grame, I believe; Mary Ann was telling me something about her the other day," Delia said, with an air of indifference.

"Well, I want to know if Mary Ann is still with you!" the widow exclaimed.

"Yes."

"She's a real smart girl. Her mother and I, and your mother, too, we all went to school together. Yes, Miss Grame boards with me; real nice girl; she works in the mill across the river, in Saco. I kinder have an idea, Delia, that mebbe she won't board with me a great while longer," and the widow looked mysterious.

"I s'pose you mean, Mrs. Gardner, that it's likely she'll go to keeping house for herself?" Delia half queried, smiling.

"Well, now, I guess that you have heard something about it," the widow said, shrewdly.

"Yes, Mary Ann told me, but I could hardly believe it."

"Well, now, I shouldn't either," said the widow, drawing her chair a little nearer to that of her visitor, and lowering her voice, "but that the deacon, his father, called on her yesterday."

The girl looked astonished, and there was just a little shade of disappointment on her face.

"Why, that was strange," she said, slowly.

"Yes, I didn't know a thing about it till after the deacon had gone away; then Liddy told me—that's her name, you know, Lydia Grame."

"Yes."

"Well, I vow, I believe you could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard of it, I was so astonished. Just like the deacon, though; he allers was one of the best-hearted men that ever did live."

"And did he come on purpose to see Miss Grame?"

"Yes, Liddy was sitting at the window, and he walked right in and introduced himself. Of course, when I heard that the deacon had been here, I was worried almost to death because I didn't see him. You see, my dear, the deacon and I used to be the best of friends. I've danced many a time with him in the old town hall over in Saco. That was years ago, when we were both young folks. Liddy told me all about what the deacon said."

"Well, is he willing that Sinclair should marry Miss Grame?" and the young girl looked just a little bit anxious as she asked the question.

"Well, I guess so," the widow replied, confidently. "Of course he didn't say right out, either one way or the other."

"But, what was the reason that he called upon her? I don't understand that."

"Well, now, that's the strangest part of the whole affair. You see, the deacon got a letter without any name signed to it, telling him that Sinclair was going to marry Miss Grame, and so the deacon he up and come right over to see what the girl was like. It was real mean, whoever did it. I don't see why folks want to meddle with other people's business, do you?"

"No," Delia rejoined, quite slowly, but the widow, deeply interested in her story, never noticed this hesitation.

"I s'pose whoever wrote the letter thought that the deacon would get mad and forbid Sin-

clair's coming here; but, they never made a bigger mistake in all their lives. You see, it was just the other way. The deacon came over to see Liddy 'cos he's a real live Yankee and got nat'ral curiosity. But he talked real good, and when he found out that Liddy didn't have any friends or relatives, he up and told her that if she wanted assistance or advice she must come right to him. Now, Delia, folks can say what they like, but the deacon has got the real salt of the earth in his nature."

"Then I suppose that Sinclair will marry this Miss Grame pretty soon?" Delia said, thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't know; there's no telling, my dear," the widow said, with a shake of the head. "Liddy declares that there isn't any engagement between her and Sinclair, but, as I tell her, there's no knowing what *will* happen. The young man thinks a good deal of her, and she does of him, though she won't own it. But, before long, I guess she'll find out that she likes him. Young girls are very contrary with their lovers sometimes. I remember I used to just plague the life out of Gardner afore we were married. I don't believe that I would have married him if he hadn't been so good to me. But we were on a picnic one day down to the Pool, and he got me to go out walking, and when he popped the question for about the four hundredth time, and I commenced to laugh at him as usual, he grabbed me right by the arms, and says he, 'If you don't say yes, El-miry, I swow I'll souse you right into the water,' and I had on my best silk dress. I kinder screamed and hollered a bit, and said, 'Oh, Josh, don't!' and then I said 'yes' afore I knew it, and, Delia, I got jest one of the best men that ever lived."

Delia laughed at the widow's story.

"And you never regretted it?"

"Never," said the widow, emphatically; "he was a good provider, and when he died, it jest took away half my life. I don't know what I should have done if it hadn't been for Jerry. He's jest like his father, jest full of mischief, but jest as good as they make men nowadays."

"How is Jerry?"

"Oh, he's well, thank you. He's down to the grocery store, jest where he used to be, clerking it. Gets forty dollars a month now, and he has full charge of the store. I s'pose he'll be a partner there 'fore long. Jerry's very saving; he's got close on to a thousand dollars in the bank."

"I must go now," Delia said, rising.

"Won't you stop to tea?"

"Oh, I can't; father will expect me home."

The widow accompanied Delia to the front door.

"Looks like a thunder-storm," she said, glancing up at the clouded sky.

"I guess I can get home before it comes," the girl said.

"I say, Delia, when are you going to get married?" "Bout time for you," the widow said, suddenly.

"I'll have to wait till somebody asks me," the girl said, laughing.

"Sakes alive! I guess there's fellows enough that would be glad to do that. I did hope, once on a time, that you and Jerry might make a match," the widow said, shrewdly.

A little tinge of color came into Delia's pale face.

"Why, how you talk, Mrs. Gardner!" she exclaimed. "Jerry never cared anything for me, I am sure!"

"Well, if your father hadn't got so awful rich, I rather guess Jerry would 'a' said something, but the money frightened him away."

"I guess it was me more than the money," Delia said, with heightened color. "Well, good-by."

CHAPTER XX.

A SOFT CONFESSION.

THE girl hurried down the path, and, as she opened the gate, took a good look up at the sky.

The clouds were very black indeed, and every now and then the dark cloud-banks opened and the forked lightning came forth.

Delia hesitated for a moment.

"You had better wait a little bit," the widow called out from the door; "Jerry will be up from the store soon with an umbrella. I'd offer you one, but there ain't an umbrella in the house."

"I guess I can get home before the storm breaks," and then Delia hurried off, the widow's shrill "Good-by, come again!" ringing in her ears.

She walked up the street as fast as she could,

but the heavens grew darker and darker each minute, and by the time she reached the corner the rain came pouring down in big drops.

Delia halted under a large tree which stood at the corner of the street.

"This will save me from getting wet," she murmured, as she took refuge under the spreading branches.

And how it did rain! Down it came in great torrents.

Delia had been standing under the tree nearly a quarter of an hour before the storm manifested the slightest intention of abating its force in the least, and then, though the drops were not so large as before, still the rain came down steadily.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the girl in dismay; "I wonder how long it's going to rain like this? Will I ever be able to get home?"

Then a man came up the street, struggling with an umbrella, for the wind was quite high, and he took refuge under the tree.

He shut up the umbrella, and the two recognized each other.

"Oh, Jerry!" cried the girl, in evident delight at the meeting.

"Why, Miss Embden, how do you do?" exclaimed Jerry, for the man with the umbrella was the grocery clerk.

"Miss Embden!" and Delia made a wry face at him; "you're getting very polite all of a sudden."

"Yes," said Jerry, rather confused.

"I should think that between such old friends as you and I quite so much ceremony wasn't needed."

"Well, we ain't been quite such good friends lately as we used to be," he said, honestly.

"Whose fault is it? Not mine, I'm sure!" Delia exclaimed, decidedly.

"I guess that it ain't mine," he said. "Fact is, Miss—I mean Delie—there's quite a leetle difference between you now and what you used to be."

"I wasn't aware that I'd changed a great deal."

"Well, I don't say that you have changed, but then circumstances have changed," he explained.

"That is, you mean that you've found some other young lady whom you like a great deal better than you do me," Delia said, just a little snappishly.

Jerry looked at her for a moment in astonishment.

"You go to thunder now!" he exclaimed, defiantly. "I swow, if you say that ag'in, I'll push you right out in the rain."

The girl did not seem to be a great deal alarmed at the threat.

"Ah, that's the way you always treated me; you never were happy unless you were abusing me," and Delia's eyes sparkled, and a shy look came over her face.

"Delie, I never abused you at all, and you know it," he said, in defense; "you used to treat me like sin, though."

"How long is it going to rain?" she asked, suddenly.

"'Bout an hour or so I guess."

"How am I going to get home?"

"Well, I'll see you home if you'll permit me," he said. "I guess the umbrella is big enough for two. We can go jest as soon as it holds up a little."

"I'm sure, I'm very much obliged," she said; "I think that it's quite fortunate, this storm and meeting you here, for I don't believe that you would have ever come to the house. You have never been to see me, Jerry, since I've lived up on the hill."

"Well, Delie, I'll spit it right out; I didn't know as I would be welcome," Jerry spoke honestly and bluntly.

The girl flushed up at once.

"Jeremiah, have I ever treated you in such a manner that you should have cause to think in that way?" she said, quite spitefully.

"Well, no; I can't say as you have," he replied, thoughtfully. "But then, you see, as I said afore, circumstances have changed. Your daddy got to be one of the richest men in town, and I ain't any thing but a clerk. It was all right when you were only plain Delia Embden, old Skipper Embden's daughter, taking in sewing and dressmaking for a living; but now that you've got to be Miss Embden, with a big house on the hill and a pair of long-tailed horses, I kinder concluded, you see, that it was 'bout time for me to haul in my horns."

"Well, I never did own that I cared any thing for you, but I like you jest as well now as I ever did," Delia responded, shyly.

"Oh, git out! That won't do, Delia! What

would Sinclair Paxton say if he heard that?" Jerry asked, with a grimace upon his face.

The girl colored up red as fire and the sharp blue eyes snapped.

"Sinclair Paxton is nothing to me!" she exclaimed.

"Glad to hear you say so, 'cos I know that he's paying attention to another gal. But, Delie, he comes to your house pretty often, and I heard your father say once that he thought you might find a worse husband than Sinclair Paxton. I kinder thought he meant that as a hint for me, and I'm like a well-brought-up dog, Delie; I always go down-stairs when I see 'em getting ready to kick me out."

"When did my father say that? How long ago?" she asked.

"Oh, a long time ago; just after he came back and commenced to build the house up on the hill."

"Well, father did want me to marry Sinclair," she said, slowly.

"I s'pose you was willing?"

"Well, yes," and Delia's face got very red again. "Now, Jerry, I ain't going to tell you a bit of a story. I don't deserve that you should care a mite for me. I've been a real cruel, heartless girl, but I'm sorry for it; but, Jerry, my head was turned, and father kept telling me how much it would please him if I would marry Sinclair, and I know I've got my faults—"

"Chock full of 'em!" Jerry observed, mischievously.

"No I ain't!" she cried, quickly; "you know better than that. But I've wanted to see you. I've been acting real mean lately, Jerry, and I've only just found it out."

"I found it out a long time ago," cruel Jerry continued, and he quietly put his arm around the slender waist of the blushing damsel and drew her close up to his side.

"Oh, don't, Jerry. If the folks should see you, what would they think?" she said, in remonstrance.

"Folks be darned!" he exclaimed, defiantly; "there ain't anybody round; it's almost pitch dark, too. But, Delie, you've made me feel so good that I must hug you a little or bust!"

"But, Jerry, do you really care for me after all my meanness?" she asked, looking up in his face.

"Well, I guess I do. We ain't any of us angels, Delie," and he bent down his head to her. She understood what he wanted.

"Don't, Jerry! you'll crumple my collar all up! Oh, dear!" she remonstrated.

"I swow I must have a kiss, Delie, jest so as to make me believe that this is all real!"

"There," she said, as she held up her lips to him, and put her arms around his neck.

A good, hearty smack Jerry imprinted on the red lips of the girl.

"Now I hope you're satisfied, you great bear!" she said, releasing herself from his embrace. "You've crumpled my collar all up' pushed my hat half off, and— Oh!"

"What's the matter?" he asked, in astonishment.

"Some drops of rain have dripped from the tree and run all down my back," she replied, shivering.

"Never mind; you'll be home soon; the rain is holding up."

"Let us go, then."

So under the shelter of the umbrella they both started.

"You can stop to tea with me, Jerry?" she asked, as they walked on through the rain.

"Yes, I s'pose I could, but what will your father say?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Oh, he'll be glad to see you!" she replied, quickly. "Father has changed a great deal lately. He hasn't been well for a long, long time. Do you know, Jerry, I wish sometimes that he hadn't made so much money; I think that he would have been a great deal happier."

"Mebbe so; riches don't always bring happiness; at the same time I jest as lief that somebody would throw a ton or two of greenbacks at me. I'd do my best to 'wrestle' with it."

"Ain't you satisfied with the fortune that you've got already?" she asked.

"Hain't got much, Delie—that is, not much when reckoned ag'in' what your daddy's got."

"Going to have me, ain't you?"

"Well, I don't know; am I?" he said, dubiously.

"Do you s'pose I should have let you kiss me if you wasn't?"

"Well, I s'pose not; but, then, you know, you women folks are so mighty onart'n."

Jerry stopped to tea and spent the evening at Daddy Embden's.

CHAPTER XXI.

SINCLAIR'S QUESTION.

THE sun was sinking slowly in the west that warm Sabbath afternoon. It had been intensely hot all day and the good people of Biddeford and Saco had suffered accordingly.

The widow Gardner and Lydia were sitting in the parlor, looking out upon the little garden, when Sinclair Paxton came up the street.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Gardner! Good-evening, Miss Grame," he said, as he halted before the house and leaned carelessly on the fence.

"Good-evening, Mr. Paxton," the widow replied, while Lydia contented herself with simply bowing.

"Ain't it hot?" the widow continued, fanning herself vigorously.

"It has been very warm, indeed," he said.

"Are you going to church to-night, Mrs. Gardner?"

"No, I'm going to stay home to-night. I thought that I should really melt this morning. Are you going this evening, Liddy?"

"No, it is too warm."

"How would you like to take a little walk before dark, Miss Grame?" he asked. "I think that we could possibly find a breeze on the hills by the stone quarry."

"Yes, go, Liddy!" cried the widow, without giving the girl time to reply. "It will do you good; you have been out of sorts all day. I'll get your hat." And Mrs. Gardner hastened away.

If she had been left to herself the girl would have refused to go, but she did not wish to provoke comment; so when the widow returned with her hat, she quickly put it on, left the house, and took Sinclair's proffered arm.

The two walked down the street together, while the widow watched them with admiring eyes.

"Sakes alive! what a nice couple they will make!" she exclaimed.

Sinclair and Lydia walked slowly on.

"Have you been ill to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, no, not ill, and yet not feeling very well."

"The walk will probably do you good, then."

"Perhaps so, and yet, if it had not been that my refusing to come would have made Mrs. Gardner wonder, I should not have accepted your escort."

"Indeed!" and Sinclair looked astonished;

"pray, may I ask the reason?"

"Do you want me to tell you frankly?"

"I hope that you will never speak in any other way with me," he said quite gravely.

"You know that your father has been to see me?" she asked, suddenly.

"Yes."

"And you know the reason why he came to see me?"

"I do."

"Every one in Biddeford couples our names together, and they have no right to do so." Lydia was strangely agitated. It was plain that she was nerving herself to play a difficult part.

"And you blame me for this?" he asked.

Lydia hesitated for a moment, looked into the grave face of her companion, then slowly made reply.

"If you did not come to see me people would be able to make remarks about the matter."

"Is it your wish, then, that I shall not come to see you?" Paxton's voice and manner were calm and grave; not the slightest trace of excitement.

"What if I say that it is?" the girl asked slowly, and with evident hesitation.

"If you do not wish me to call upon you—if you wish our friendship to stop—it is only necessary for you to say so and I shall most assuredly endeavor to comply with your wishes."

Lydia seemed perplexed. She walked on for a few minutes in silence; then she suddenly spoke, stealing a sly glance at Sinclair's face as she did so.

"The people speak of us as if we were engaged lovers."

"Yes, I know that; and now will you permit me to ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Have I ever acted in such a manner as to lead any one to suppose that we were engaged?"

"No, I suppose not," the girl responded, slowly; "only that your visits lead folks to think so."

"The remedy for that is simple enough; I won't come to see you any more."

Again Lydia was silent for quite a long time.

"You know I have told you very often that I did not care for you in the way which you

seem to want me to care for you," she at length remarked.

"Yes, I know that."

"I suppose that is the reason why you are willing to discontinue your visits?"

"Not at all, for I have a most decided belief that you do care for me, and in precisely the way that I want you to." Sinclair spoke confidently.

Lydia looked in his face in utter astonishment.

"Why, what makes you say that?" she asked.

"Because I believe it."

"But it is not true."

"Are you sure of it?" the young man's manner was exceedingly confident. "Suppose I prove to you that it is true?"

"You can not do so!" the girl exclaimed, quickly, and yet there was a lack of confidence in her tone.

"You have told me twenty times at least that you do not love me—that you only respect me as a friend."

"Yes, and that is the truth," but the girl uttered the speech as though she fully expected him to prove that it was not.

"You mean that you believe it to be true?"

"Why, I am sure I ought to know whether it is true or not." Lydia was just a little bewildered at the manner of her lover.

"Twenty times you have told me, 'I do not love you,' and twenty times the moment after your actions have convinced me you do love me, or, at least, care a little for me."

"Mr. Paxton—"

"Don't interrupt me now, Lydia, please; wait until I am through," he said, firmly. "I do not doubt that, in your heart, you think of me only as a friend, and never in the light of a possible husband. Now, I am going to convince you that you have really mistaken your feelings, and that you do love me a little, and the chances are that, one of these days, you will care for me with all the passion your heart is capable of feeling."

"I do not think you can prove this by my actions," she said, doubtfully.

"I am going to try," he responded. "But if I succeed the victory will be a costly one to me, for in the future you will be on your guard and that will deprive me of a great deal of pleasure which I now enjoy. I think I fully understand you, Lydia; it is your will, not your heart, which forbids love. Now, then, to begin: you have other gentlemen friends besides myself, of course; Jerry Gardner, for one."

"Yes."

"How many times has Jerry kissed you?"

"Oh, Sinclair!" the tone of pain told fully how deeply the girl was hurt by the question.

"You don't answer; won't you reply, please?" he said, gently, but with firmness.

"Why do you ask such a question?" the girl said, and tears sparkled in her dark eyes.

"I must ask it; why don't you reply? It's simple enough. How many times has Jerry Gardner kissed you?"

"Never, in all his life!" exclaimed the girl, quickly.

"There, now, that's the answer," and a quiet smile appeared on his face. "How many times has any other Biddeford or Saco gentleman kissed you?"

"Why do you ask such questions?" Lydia exclaimed, petulantly. "No one has ever kissed me since I have been here."

"Except Sinclair Paxton," he said, a volume of meaning in the words.

A moment Lydia looked him in the face, and then her gaze sunk to the ground, and a burning blush swept over her pale cheeks and forehead.

"You have freely yielded to me your forehead, your eyes, and your cheeks, reserving only your lips, and yet you coldly tell me, 'I do not love you—you are only a friend,' and expect me to believe it."

"Oh, Sinclair, you are so cruel!" the girl said, blushing deeply.

"No, no, Lydia, not cruel; I am only just," he answered. "You have compelled me to this. You have really, to a certain extent, led me on. It was in your power to have stopped this affair right at the beginning. You have received my attentions, conscious that they tended only to one end, marriage, and now you say, stop. But, Lydia, you do not mean what you say, or else you have acted with me in a way that a girl should not act with a man unless she intends to marry him."

"Perhaps I have been foolish," she murmured, lowly.

"Not if you love me, which I think you do; that would excuse all. But if you still persist

in saying that you do not care for me, what construction can I put upon your actions?"

"Oh, Sinclair, I am in such a terrible position!" she murmured.

"A terrible position!" he said, in wonder; "I do not understand how that can be."

"Oh, if I could only speak!" she cried, distractedly.

"And why not? Surely you can trust me. Speak freely. Believe me, I will keep your secret."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE IVORY PORTRAIT.

For a little way the two walked on in silence. Lydia seemed lost in thought and Paxton watched her downcast face eagerly and earnestly.

"Well, will you not speak?" he said, after a long pause.

"Suppose that there is a barrier between us?" she said, slowly; "suppose that it is impossible for me to marry you?"

"How can that be?" Sinclair asked, in astonishment, and for the first time he appeared troubled.

"There may be twenty reasons, any one of which would render our union impossible."

"Yes, there may be," he said, doubtfully.

"but you do not say that there is."

"Why force me to say cruel words? I wish to spare you pain," she said, earnestly.

"Lydia, if there is really a reason why we should not come together, you have not acted rightly in this matter," he said, gravely.

"I know it, and it is that which makes me miserable," she said, sadly. "I was so happy in your society that I was not conscious of the danger to which I was exposing both of us. It was like sailing on the stream above the rapids; one glides along unconscious of danger until the roar of the water dashing upon the breaking rocks rises upon the air, and then, fast-locked in the embrace of the tide, escape is impossible. Blame me for all that has occurred. It is all my fault. I saw that you were beginning to care for me, but—Heaven help me!—I had not the courage to warn you of your danger."

"Lydia, you speak in riddles. Why not tell me if there be any reason which prevents our marriage?"

"There is—there is!" The voice was almost a wail.

"Yes, but explain."

"Oh, it is too dreadful."

By this time the two had reached the quarry. The sun was sinking slowly behind the far-off horizon line.

"Let us climb up to the top of the rocks; we've a good hour of daylight yet," he said. "We can sit and chat for twenty or thirty minutes, and then have plenty of time to go home before dark."

Slowly they climbed to the top of the hill and sat down upon some huge rocks which cropped out of the ground.

"Come now, make me your confidant, Lydia," he said, coaxingly. "I can not bring myself to believe that there really exists any barrier between us."

"There is one," she said, sadly.

"Tell me what it is, and see how quickly I'll find a way to overleap it. I am not poor, Lydia, and money removes a great many barriers in the world."

"Yes, you are rich and I am poor," she answered, plucking the leaves listlessly from a little shrub which grew by the side of the rock.

"Is that the reason?" he demanded. "Because if it is, that can be easily remedied."

"No, it is not that."

"What then?"

"Suppose that I am already married?" Lydia did not look Sinclair in the face as she put the question, but kept her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Let me look in your eyes, Lydia," he said, quietly.

Slowly she raised her head and looked with a mournful gaze into his face.

"That is not the reason, Lydia; you are not married," he said, confidently.

"You think so?" she said, deeply agitated, and again she looked down upon the ground.

"I am sure of it. Come, your reason."

"Suppose that I had committed some great crime?"

"A great crime?"

"Yes, suppose that I was a murderess, would you love me then?" Cold and unnatural was her voice.

"Oh, nonsense!" he cried, lightly. "You are only trying me, Lydia, but you shall find that

my love is so strong that if you will only give yourself to me, I will take you almost without question."

"Ob, you do love me!" she exclaimed, and she raised her large eyes, now moist with tear-drops, to his face.

"Yes, I do; men say that I am an icicle, Lydia, but I sometimes fancy that I am a great deal more like a slumbering volcano," he said, smiling.

"Let us go home now," and she rose as she spoke.

The red glare of the setting sun came full upon the rocky summit and seemed to crown the head of the girl with a halo of light.

As Sinclair gazed upon her, he thought that he had never seen her look so lovely before.

Paxton sprang lightly down the rock-ledge—'twas some three feet descent—and turned to offer his hand to the girl.

"I can jump," she said, and she sprang from the rock, but as she came down, her ankle twisted under her, and with a moan, rung forth by acute pain, she sunk down in a faint upon the rocks.

Sinclair was at her side in an instant, and kneeling, raised her head from the ground and supported it upon his knee. As he did so, an ivory portrait which was suspended from her neck by a blue ribbon, slipped from its place of concealment in her bosom.

The piece of ivory lay upon Sinclair's knee, the picture in plain sight. He could not help but see it. A jealous pang shot through his heart when he saw that it was the picture of a young and handsome man.

He had little time for reflection, for 'twas but a moment before Lydia recovered her senses.

"I'm afraid that I have sprained my ankle," she said, as she raised her head, then her eyes fell upon the portrait dangling from her bosom, and a quick, hot flush came over her face.

"It came from the bosom of your dress when you fell," he said, a little constraint visible in his manner.

"You have looked at it?" she asked, leaning back against the rock.

"Yes, I could not help doing so, as it lay upon my knee. Lydia, has that portrait any thing to do with this mystery which seems to surround you?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Lydia, I confess I am curious," he said, slowly. "Is that the portrait of a brother?"

"No; I never had a brother."

"Is it then the portrait of a lover—a husband?"

The girl's face flushed, but she did not reply.

"You will not answer?" he persisted.

"No."

A moment Sinclair gazed into the face of the girl.

"Lydia!" he cried, suddenly, "I will trust you, even though you do not speak. Let me help you up."

She had sprained her ankle quite badly, and could only walk with difficulty.

Sinclair half-carried her down the hill, and on reaching the level ground they paused to rest for a moment.

"Sinclair, you do not ask me to tell you whose picture this is which I carry in my bosom?" she said, leaning heavily on his arm, and looking up full into his face with her dark eyes.

"No, I do not care to know," he replied; "my curiosity is gone. In your own good time you shall tell me all."

"I am not worthy of a love like yours," she said, earnestly; "is it not better that you should stop now? You are not yet so deeply involved that you cannot retreat."

"Oh, no; I will go onward," he replied, carelessly, "and if you can be won, I'm the man that will win you."

"Tell me how I can persuade you to stop?" she asked, earnestly.

"There is only one way," he answered gravely.

"And that is?"

"Convince me that you are really unworthy of me; that may effect a cure."

"It will be so hard for me to do that!" she responded sadly.

"Yes, I do not doubt that," he said smiling.

"No, no, I do not mean that," she exclaimed, quickly, perceiving how he had misinterpreted her words; "I mean that it will be so painful for me to speak the words which will surely convince you that we can never be man and wife."

"When I hear you speak, then I shall believe," he replied.

Then they walked slowly back to the village.

It was quite dark when they arrived at Lydia's house. Her ankle had got much better during the walk.

The two stood together in the porch.

"Good-night," he said, and he bent down as if to kiss her cheek.

"If I let you do that, you will tell me of it at some future time." She spoke half in jest, half earnest.

"You forced me to tell you," he replied.

Slowly the cheek was raised to meet his lips.

"Good-night," she said, and passed into the house, while he departed down the street.

Lydia bound up her sprained ankle and went to bed early that night.

Before she extinguished the light, she drew the ivory miniature from its hiding-place in her bosom and kissed it again and again; and yet, when snug in bed and the light extinguished, another face floated before her eyes, a face that bore the impress of the Saco-Indian blood, and as her senses reeled to dreamland, her lips murmured:

"Dear, dear Sinclair!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAISY AT BAY.

PROMPTLY at the time appointed, Hollis was on the spot where he had arranged to meet Mr. Daisy Brick, but that gentleman did not make his appearance, and after waiting an hour or so for him, the carpenter began to believe that he did not intend to keep the appointment when he had made it.

"Curse him!" muttered Hollis, in a rage; "I ought to have strangled him when I had my hands on his throat."

The carpenter was pretty well under the influence of liquor, and his patience was not remarkable even when sober.

His acquaintances in the town had noticed that, for a week or so, Hollis had been drinking very hard. In fact, it had become quite a novelty to see him sober.

Everybody said that Jed Hollis was going to the devil as fast as he could, but no one volunteered to stretch forth a hand to save him.

Hollis fumed and raved as he strode up and down, waiting for Brick to come.

Finally he lost what little patience he had.

"I'll go after him!" he cried, "the mean sneak! He'll find he can't make a fool of Jed Hollis. He's got to tell me what I want to know, and if he don't I'll smash him, that's all."

And with this threat, he started to find Brick.

Up and down the streets of Biddeford, Hollis went, but no trace of Brick could he find.

At last the carpenter took up his stand in front of the post-office. He had worked himself up into a terrible rage. One thing only afforded him any consolation, and that was the thought of how he would demolish Brick the moment he could get his hands upon him.

Hollis saw that the slippery gentleman had tricked him, but inwardly he vowed that he would fully square the account at the first meeting.

The carpenter had inquired of two or three whom he thought likely to know something of Brick, as to his whereabouts, but the inquiry was fruitless. He could not gain any information whatever.

"Oh, won't I smash him!" he kept repeating to himself, as he cooled his rage and his heels on the post-office corner.

At last Hollis came to the conclusion that he might as well go home. The carpenter boarded with an aunt of his, just on the outskirts of the town.

Slowly, and still keeping a good look-out about him, Hollis proceeded homeward. He had an idea now that he had given up his search for the missing Mr. Brick, that by accident he might stumble upon him.

An accident—the wonderful helper to fortune in this life—did befriend the desperate man. At the very first corner that he turned he beheld the elegant figure of Daisy Brick, Esq., proceeding leisurely down the street.

The carpenter at once gave chase.

Brick's attention was suddenly attracted by the sound of the heavy footsteps behind him. He looked around and saw his enemy.

"I've got you!" the carpenter cried, in triumph.

But Hollis "gave tongue" too soon.

Brick was some twenty paces from him, and the moment he recognized the carpenter and heard his meaning shout, he took to his heels and ran like a grayhound.

"Stop, you fool!" cried Hollis, in a rage. He felt perfectly sure of overtaking Brick, and was

annoyed that the fugitive would put him to the trouble of running after him.

The carpenter was noted among the young fellows of the town for his skill in manly sports, and rather prided himself on his fleetness of foot.

But Jed Hollis of twenty-eight, and Jed Hollis of twenty-one, were two very different persons. The carpenter had been a hard drinker for the past three or four years, and continued struggles with "John Barleycorn" don't improve a man's wind, and do impair his stamina.

Away went Brick, and away went Hollis after him.

The wonderful foot-race through the quiet streets of Biddeford would have undoubtedly attracted a great deal of attention, but as it was late—past ten—nearly all of the good people had gone to bed.

To his utter astonishment, after chasing Brick for a short time, Hollis discovered that he was losing ground. He groaned in rage, and dashed on at his utmost strength; but there again, Jed Hollis, full of liquor, was not Jed Hollis quite sober; and Brick, whose fear lent wings to his heels, and who never once looked behind him, soon left his angry pursuer far behind.

Around a corner went Brick, and when Hollis reached and turned the corner, he could not even hear the sound of the fugitive's flying footsteps.

Hollis, out of breath, and chock-full of rage, halted on the corner for a few moments, and relieved his mind by cursing Brick, up hill and down, as the saying is. Then a bright idea flashed into his muddled brain.

Might not Brick be hiding somewhere along the street?

If so, that would account for the sound of his footsteps ceasing, for that he had been able to run clear out of hearing, the enraged man could not believe. So he slowly went up one side of the street and down the other. He peered over all the fences and into all the gardens, but he was not destined to be successful at this game of hide and seek. Trace of Brick he could not find. So he halted again on the corner, and amused himself by swearing at the man who had proved himself to be the better runner.

And after this little episode, Hollis again turned his steps homeward. He had reluctantly come to the conclusion that he was not fated to have an interview with Mr. Daisy Brick that night. But the chapter of accidents was in the carpenter's favor.

He had turned back—for the chase had led him away a little from his direct road homeward—and was proceeding by the shortest way to his abode, when, as he turned the corner of a street, he came face to face with Brick.

That worthy gentleman had, in reality, completely run away from the carpenter, and after going two or three blocks, had made a *detour* to get back to the center of the town again, never dreaming that there was any danger of meeting the man whom he was so desirous of avoiding.

"Aha!" cried Hollis, in joy, springing forward to seize Brick; but Daisy was no less quick than the carpenter. He gave a bound out into the middle of the street, and, as Hollis came after him, drew a revolver from his pocket and leveled it full at his enemy.

The carpenter paused, glancing upon Brick with eyes full of rage, but, angry as he was, he did not rush upon the little shining barrel leveled at his heart.

"Keep off!" cried Brick, in a tone which showed that he did not consider the affair to be a joking matter; "keep off!" he repeated, "or I'll put a ball right through you!"

"Oh, you will, will you?" growled Hollis, almost beside himself with rage.

"I'm in earnest now; just keep your hands off me, or you'll get hurt!"

"Why didn't you keep your appointment?"

"I never intended to," Brick replied, defiantly. "I don't relish appointments with mad-men."

"I'm not mad."

"Well, you're drunk; it's all the same."

"Ain't you going to tell me the secret about this girl?"

"I'll see you in the bottomless pit first!" Brick replied, without an instant's hesitation.

"I've got the hundred dollars for you," Hollis said, changing his tone to one of entreaty.

"Look here, my friend; you think if you get this secret, that, by the use of it, you can compel Lydia Grane to marry you?" Brick asked.

"Yes, that is what I want," Hollis replied, eagerly.

"Well, if you knew it, it wouldn't help you a bit. You would be just as far away from any chance of marrying her as before."

"I know you're lying!" Hollis cried, sullenly.

"You lie when you say so!" Brick cried.

"What?" and the carpenter made a motion as if to advance upon Brick, but the latter quickly retreated a few steps and the glitter of his eyes told of danger.

"You'll get it now, first thing you know!" he cried, angrily.

"I was a fool that I let you go when I had you down by the quarry!" Hollis said, menacingly.

"You won't catch me a second time that way," Brick replied. "The moment I got back to town I invested in this revolver, so as to be prepared for you."

"I'll fix you yet!" the carpenter said, and he set his teeth firmly together.

"I give you fair warning that, if you attack me, I'll shoot you down just the same as I would a mad dog. I don't propose to fool with any such man as you are."

"You won't tell me the secret about this girl, then?" Hollis said, slowly.

"No, not much!" Brick replied, defiantly.

"I'll find it out yet, and I'll get even with you, too, see if I don't!" and with this parting salutation, Hollis turned his back upon Brick and walked away.

Daisy watched him for a moment, and then went on his course, keeping a careful look-out behind him, lest the enraged man should take him by surprise.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DADDY EMBDEN SEEKS COUNSEL.

PELEG EMBDEN had been in ill health for some little time. He was nervous and fretful, started at shadows, and the mere jarring of a door or window was quite sufficient to throw him into a fever. To Delia's suggestions of a doctor, the old man would shiver and rather crossly intimate that there wasn't any thing the matter with him.

But the clear-sighted Delia knew better. The old man was growing thinner and thinner each day. It was plainly evident that some secret care was weighing upon his mind. Peleg Embden, the millionaire, was not the man that Skipper Embden, of the good schooner *Nancy Jane*, had been.

The moment that night came on the old man would sit down before the window and gaze out into the darkness.

Delia, who watched him closely, could hear him muttering commands as though once more on the deck of the coasting schooner. Then he would imagine that he saw a light swinging in darkness, a signal, and give instructions to have it answered; speak of the turn of the tide and work himself up into a fever of anxiety. Then he would cry, "There goes the rocket; Heaven have mercy on his soul!" and shiver and shake as though stricken with an ague fit. Just at this point the daughter would interfere, get the old man away from the window and set him down by the table. And at the moment the curtain was drawn down and the darkness shut out, he would become himself again.

Delia noticed that these strange fancies never attacked her father in the daytime; it was only at night, gazing out into the darkness, that he would speak of the schooner. But, sometimes, during the day, he would give way to odd fancies, and put such strange questions that Delia trembled for her father's reason. But, as a general thing, he seemed sane enough; so the daughter kept her fears to herself.

On Monday evening, just after supper, the old gentleman announced his intention of calling upon Mr. Paxton.

But when Delia saw her father take his cane and hat, she saw that he intended to walk, and it alarmed her.

"You are not going out to walk, father?" she said, in remonstrance.

"Yes, of course," he answered; "mebbe it will do me good to go over the river."

"But you had better have Nathan and the carriage!" she exclaimed.

"No, no, I don't want him. I allers used to walk—and mebbe I'll have to ag'in, one of these days," he added, half to himself.

"But can't he drive over and bring you home? It's a long way, father, and it will be dark."

"Dark—yes; he can come after me," he said, slowly; the word *dark* seemed to make a great impression upon him.

"What time shall he come, father?"

"'Bout nine," he answered. "I want to hev a good long talk with the deacon. The deacon's a smart man, and I want his advice."

Then the old sailor set out. He walked slowly along, apparently absorbed in thought. His

peaked and colorless face was strangely gloomy, and many of his acquaintances, whom he passed as he went down the main street, noticed his abstraction, and 'cute folks afterward "guessed" that old Daddy Embden was breaking up.

But the old man looked neither to the right nor left, but kept straight on over the bridge and up through Saco, till at last he came to the deacon's house.

Paxton was busy with his newspaper, as was usual with him at that hour of the evening, so the visitor was conducted up into the library.

"Good-evening, Mr. Embden," the deacon said, rising to greet the old captain; "take a chair."

Paxton laid aside his newspaper and prepared to hear what Embden had to say. He guessed at once that his visitor had come on business, for there was very little social intimacy between the genial, broad-minded deacon and the unsocial, close-fisted Embden, who, since his return to Biddeford, had seemed to have but two ideas: the first, to make money; the second, to let people know that he had it.

Deacon Paxton had been reared in a different school altogether from that of the coasting skipper. Born to wealth, he regarded it as a servant, not as a master. His brain had not been dazzled by a sudden rise to fortune. He regarded money in its true light—a most excellent slave, but a most terrible tyrant if you give way to it.

"I thought that I would drop over an' gi'n you a neighborly call this evening, deacon," Embden said, in his squeaky voice, and restless, nervous manner.

"Glad to have you call," the deacon responded, just a little bit astonished, for it was the first time that Embden ever had honored him in that way. Paxton took a good look at his visitor and marveled at the change which had taken place in him since he last saw him, some two weeks before.

Embden—always thin and careworn in the face—looked only like a ghost of himself.

"You have been sick?" the deacon asked.

"Wal—no, I can't call it sick, deacon, but a leetle ailing; kinder out of sorts, you know," Embden replied.

"To what do you attribute it?"

"I dunno," Embden said, with a shake of the head.

"Possibly you miss the sea and the active life which you used to lead," the deacon suggested. "You've made the great mistake which nearly all men make in this life. The boy goes into an active business life at fifteen, say; toils and struggles upward till he becomes a man of forty-five or fifty; accumulates wealth, and for ten years before he retires he says to himself, 'In about ten years more I shall have all the money I want; then I shall retire and enjoy it.' The ten years pass away; he gives up his business, retires, probably buys a country place; the man who for thirty years has been battling daily in the strife for wealth, which we call business, suddenly draws out. He wants rest, and in a year or so he gets so much of it that he dies. In reality, the thirty years of toil has made it necessary to his existence; the moment the weight is removed from his brain, it softens and kills him. Have you never noticed, Mr. Embden, how many of our leading business men die soon after they retire from active life?"

"Wal—now you speak of it, 'pears to me I hev," Embden really had very few ideas in regard to the subject.

"This is the only thing that can save them," and the deacon waved his hand around and pointed to the well-stocked library. "Let them before they retire learn to seek companionship in books, in art and science, and in the really lonely retirement of a country home, these will aid to fill the place of the toil and bustle of an active business life."

"Wal, I never took much to 'books," Embden said, slowly.

"No, your habits tended another way. You have worked hard all your life; had very few pleasures; probably looking forward to the day when you should be able to leave the sea and settle down with your family on shore."

"That's so, deacon," Embden said, quietly. "From the time I got married to Nancy till I did settle down, I was allers looking forward to it, and a more keener man, and a more saving one about money matters, deacon, never lived."

"There it is, you see; probably you and your wife deprived yourselves of a good many little comforts looking forward to the time when you would be able to afford luxuries, and when that time did come, only one of you could enjoy it."

"True as gospel, deacon," Embden responded. "It was an awful blow to me when Nancy died. I should hev thought it was a visitation of Providence, but it came afore."

Paxton looked at Embden with an expression of astonishment upon his face.

"Come before?" he said.

"Afore I got rich, I mean," he explained, but there was a peculiar guilty look upon the old man's face.

"There's the lesson which I have been preaching all my life," the deacon continued; "possibly you may remember the story of the Virginian, Randolph of Roanoke, jumping up in the house and exclaiming, 'Gentlemen, I have found the philosopher's stone: pay as you go!' So I might claim to have discovered the proper way to live; enjoy all the comforts—not luxuries, mind—that you can, as you go."

"Mebbe you're right," Embden said, thoughtfully. "I'm glad, deacon, that you've talked 'bout these things, 'cos I see you're jest the man to give me a leetle advice on a matter that's been puzzling me some."

"I'll advise you to the best of my ability," Paxton affirmed, now beginning to understand why he had been honored by a visit from Daddy Embden.

"Wal, deacon, it's a matter right in your line," Embden said, in explanation. "You're in the church, you know, an' this leetle matter is a sort of a matter of conscience."

"Let me hear what it is."

"Wal—now in the late war, who was to blame for the killing?"

Paxton looked at the anxious face of the old man in utter astonishment.

"I don't exactly understand," he said.

"Don't you see? Who was to blame for the killing? 'Twasn't the sogers, 'cos of course they were put there to kill each other; but do you think that the men that put 'em there was jest as much to blame as if they had killed them that was killed with their own hands, right down in cold blood?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FACE IN THE GLOOM.

THE deacon looked into the anxious face of Embden in considerable astonishment. It was plain that for a moment he thought Embden was out of his head.

"What do you think?" asked Embden, anxiously, finding that the deacon did not reply. "Do you think that when the day of judgment comes they will hev to answer for the bloodshed?"

"Well, really, your question covers so much ground that it is hardly possible to form an opinion on the subject," the deacon answered.

Embden looked terribly disappointed. A painful expression came over his features, and he bent his eyes to the ground.

"It's a great pity," he half sighed; "if you could hev only give me your opinion, deacon, I think it would hev done me a power of good. It's awful if a man's got to answer for blood spilt that way, when he didn't do nothing himself."

The deacon looked at the working of Embden's face for a moment, and then a sudden light seemed to flash upon his brain.

"Mr. Embden, excuse me, but I don't think you've put the case exactly right. Our civil war was not brought on by men but by circumstances. It was really fated to be, like a thunder-storm to clear the atmosphere. Let me put a suppositional case, which I think I can do, and the answer may suffice for the question which you have in your mind."

"Mebbe you can, deacon," Embden rejoined, raising his head as he spoke and looking at the deacon with an anxious expression upon his features.

"If I get your meaning rightly, is a man guilty of murder who takes no part in it himself, yet by his action or actions makes that murder possible which otherwise it would not be?"

"Yas, that's it, deacon," Embden said, in deep attention, breathlessly hanging as it were upon the words of Paxton.

"Now, we'll suppose a case: Two men are engaged in a struggle; a third man stands by and looks on; he makes no attempt whatever to interfere, be his reasons what they may. One man of the two is killed; is the third man then guilty of the—"

"Hold on, deacon," interrupted Embden, gravely and evidently deeply excited; "that don't cover the ground at all!"

"No?" and the deacon looked perplexed.

"Not the case I want; the man brings on the fight; it wouldn't hev commenced but for him."

and he could have prevented it if he'd wanted to.

"But he took no actual part in the affair, did he?"

"No, only he told one man to come to the place and he told the others that he was coming; but of course he didn't know that the first feller would be killed by the other ones, though he kinder 'spected there'd be a leetle trouble," Embden spoke in a hurried, constrained manner; evidently the subject was a very painful

Paxton looked at the old skipper for a moment in silence. There was a thoughtful expression upon his smooth, benevolent face.

"I think I understand it now," he said; "I will put the case again: There is a man who has enemies. Another man induces him to go to a certain place at a certain time; and beforehand he tells this man's enemies that the man will come to a certain place and at a certain time, and he knows that they will lie in ambush there for him. He is not really certain that they intend to kill the man, but he is fully aware that they are enemies, and that they do not lie in wait for him for any good purpose. The man comes, decoyed there by the second party; he is set upon, and in the struggle is killed. The man who has decoyed him takes no part in the struggle."

"A mile off!" interrupted Embden, breathlessly, and hardly able to sit still in his anxiety.

"Is a mile off, or a rod, or ten miles; the distance is nothing," the deacon continued; "he does not strike the man, does not lift a finger against him—"

"And is sorry, too, that he had anything to do with it, when he thought that the man would get killed," Embden added earnestly.

"That amounts to nothing at all," the deacon said; "but, does the case that I have stated suit?"

"Yes, to a hair!" was Embden's solemn reply.

"And you want my opinion as to the guilt of the man who acted the decoy to the slain man?"

"Yas, yas."

"Well, sir, in the eyes of Heaven, I think that he will be held to be more guilty than the men who really shed the blood, and that, if there is hell-fire hereafter, that man will roast in it, beyond a doubt."

With a hollow groan, Embden sunk back in his chair: another second and he fell helpless to the floor: he had fainted.

"Hallo! hallo!" cried the deacon, rising, in alarm. "I made the dose too strong. Poor sinner! Of what use is his money with this weight hanging on his soul?"

The deacon did not call assistance, but took the pitcher of ice-water from the table and sprinkled the face of the old man. Then he raised him gently in his arms and placed him upon the lounge. He sprinkled some more water upon his face and loosened his necktie.

"I wouldn't carry around the weight this man bears for all the money in the State of Maine," the deacon observed, as he stood by the old man.

Slowly Daddy Embden revived.

With a helpless, scared look, he glanced up into the deacon's face.

"Do you think that he really will burn?" he asked, anxiously.

"If he sincerely repents, he may be saved," the deacon replied, with real solemnity.

"If I war only sure of it," Embden muttered, half to himself, half aloud.

"While the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return; though his sins be as red as scarlet, yet His love shall make them white as snow," the deacon reminded his patient.

"S'pose he got money, too, through this killing?" Embden asked.

"Let him give it back!" cried the deacon. "Blood-money is accursed; it is a weight which sinks the soul down to hell. Brother, let us pray!"

Together the two men knelt down, and a short and earnest prayer the deacon offered up; then the old skipper went back to the time when he knelt by his mother's side, by the little trundle-bed in the humble widow's cottage, and prayed to the Lord of Hosts, who, on George's bank, had taken unto his bosom the sailor husband and father of that home.

"And now give me your hand, Peleg," the deacon said, without rising from his knees. "Now promise me that this man, morning and night, shall pray for forgiveness; make him give up his ill-gotten gains; such money never brings prosperity. Let him go back to his former occupation, no matter what it was, no matter how humble. A crust and a contented

mind are better far than boundless riches and sleepless nights!"

"He shall, deacon, he shall!" and the tears were streaming in the eyes of the old man.

Then the two rose to their feet. The gloom and dusk of the evening surrounded them.

"Deacon, do you believe in spirits?" asked Embden, suddenly, and with a nervous glance around him.

"From the other world? No."

"Well, I didn't used to, but I'm beginning to believe that there are such things. I seem to hear things in the air round me after dark. I don't see anything, but I expect to, soon."

"It is only your imagination, Mr. Embden," the deacon said, reassuringly, placing his hands on the old man's shoulder.

"Mebbe it is. Wal, I'll bid you good-night; I'm much obleeged. I feel a great deal better. Nathan was coming with the carriage, but I guess I'll walk and meet him."

Paxton escorted the old man to the door, and watched him until he got half-way to the gate; then he closed the door.

"I know now what preys on Embden's conscience, but it is still a question with me where he got all that money," he said, as he ascended the stairs to the library again.

Embden was walking slowly to the gate, with his eyes fixed upon the ground.

A hedge, some four feet high, separated the grounds of the mansion from the street.

The gloom had thickened quite rapidly, and one could scarcely see twenty feet in advance. Just before Embden got to the gate he happened to look up, and he beheld a sight which froze his blood with horror.

Just beyond the gate a face appeared in the gloom.

Embden recognized each feature in an instant—although many months had come and gone since he had looked upon the face in the flesh.

But that face, since the dark night when the Nancy Jane floated with the turn of the tide down the Rappahannock, and out into Chesapeake Bay, had been ever present before Embden's eyes.

The proud, haughty, southern features; the eyes of fire and the white forehead half-covered by the straw hat.

And now, framed in the gloom of the night, the face appeared before him, but, even to the panic-stricken eyes of the feeble old man, it looked much fresher and more youthful than when he saw it in life.

The face had grown young in the other world.

A moment only Peleg Embden glared upon the sight, and then, with a low moan he sunk helpless, almost lifeless, to the ground. The sea had given up its dead!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SPIRIT AGAIN.

ABOUT half-past eight, Nathan, Daddy Embden's "hired man," hitched up one of the horses to a light buggy, and started for Deacon Paxton's house, in Saco, after the old captain.

He did not hurry himself, but drove along leisurely, as Delia had instructed him to get there about nine.

As he drove up the crest of the hill, on the Saco side of the river, he consulted the old-fashioned, open-face silver watch which he carried.

"Five minutes of nine," he said; "I guess I'll be right on time."

He had driven slowly in front of a druggist's shop which afforded him light, so that he might consult his time-piece.

"Git up, Jim," he cried, touching the horse with the whip.

Five minutes more and he halted in front of Deacon Paxton's house.

"I guess I'd better let the old man know I'm here," he said, as he left the buggy.

Nathan opened the gate and advanced upon the walk toward the house. He had only taken some five steps when he tumbled over a dark body on the ground and went sprawling at full length upon the walk.

"Darnation!" he cried, picking himself up in disgust. "I wonder who on earth that is stretched out there? He must be pretty drunk, I s'pose!"

Then Nathan bent over the motionless form and rolled the senseless man over on his face.

"By gosh! if it ain't the old man!" he cried, in profound astonishment; "drunk all through, too," he added. "Wal, I never knowed that the deacon got men slewed in his house afore. I s'pose I'd better carry the old rip home and keep my mouth shet 'bout it."

Then the strong-limbed Yankee lifted the helpless form of Embden from the ground—an

act which seemed to call the old man back to consciousness. A low groan came from his lips; he opened his eyes slowly and stared around him, in a feeble, vacant way.

"Where is it?" he muttered, slowly and nervously.

"I guess the deacon's in the house, capt'n," Nathan said, thinking that the old man referred to Paxton.

"No, no, not the deacon, the other?" and Embden glared around him with dilated eyes.

"Who in thunder does he mean?" Nathan queried to himself, in wonder.

"Didn't you see it?" the old man asked.

"See the deacon?"

"No, no; the other; that dreadful sight," the old man moaned.

"I s'pose the old feller is awfully slewed," Nathan muttered, to himself.

"Which way did you come?" Embden asked, suddenly.

"Straight from the house; there ain't but one road, you know, squire."

"And it was going that way," the old man persisted; "you must have met it."

Nathan looked at the speaker in profound astonishment.

"I guess that he must be as crazy as a bed-bug!" he concluded. "I wonder who in thunder he's talking about?"

"Oh, dear!" Embden moaned, helplessly; "I want to go home."

"All right, cap'n; got the buggy outside."

"But you are sure that you didn't see any thing as you came up the road?" Embden demanded, suddenly, and looking Nathan straight in the face.

"See what, squire? Darn me if I know what you're driving at!"

"Can I be going crazy?" the old man asked, speaking more to himself than to the astonished listener who supported him in his arms.

"I guess you are, or awfully slewed," Nathan muttered, in an undertone.

"Oh! the dead can't come back, can they, Nathan?"

"I guess not; I never heerd of anybody coming back arter they once kicked the bucket."

"Yet I am sure I saw him; it was the same face, and the eyes glared at me with a stony, reproachful look."

"Show!" Nathan ejaculated, in wonder; "I better get the old feller home, or he'll be chasin' snakes all over the deacon's front yard the first thing I know."

"Nathan, you won't let him touch me, will you?" the old man asked earnestly.

"Guess not! I'd flax the daylight right out'en him!" Nathan replied, gently urging the old man to the carriage.

Embden was shaking and shivering as though an icy wind was cutting him to the bone.

After considerable trouble Nathan got the old man into the carriage, and, turning the horse around, started homeward for Biddeford—the old skipper muttering in disconnected sentences as they rode onward.

Nathan was bothered. He kept a close watch upon the old man, for he had now made up his mind that Daddy Embden was going crazy.

"The old fish may take a notion to bite me, first thing I know," he muttered; "I never hired out to take care of a mad critter. I'd like to sell out this job, cheap!"

But the old man showed no signs of violence, although his mutterings gave strong evidence of an unsound mind.

All the while as they rode along he was peering out, watching first one side of the road and then the other; and every now and then he would mutter; "I do not see it! I do not see it!" and Nathan as often would put the question to himself, "Who in thunder does he expect to see?"

They drove through Saco and crossed the bridge.

Just as they left the bridge and commenced to ascend the little hill on the Biddeford side, Embden gave a sudden, hollow groan, and slid out of his seat down into the body of the buggy in a heap. He had fainted again.

Nathan was terribly alarmed, but drove to the top of the hill before he attempted to render any assistance. Then he let the horse jog along slowly, while he tried to revive the old man.

It was only a few minutes before Embden recovered, and then he looked up into Nathan's face with trembling features.

"I saw it again," he muttered.

"Saw what, squire?"

"A spirit from the other world!"

"Show!"

"Yas; oh, I know the face; it has allers

been afore me since that night when it floated down the Rappahannock, ghastly in the moon-light."

"Lordy!" cried Nathan, a cold shiver passing over him: "you don't mean for to say that you saw a real ghost walking in the street?"

"Yas, I saw it," the old man replied, earnestly; "that is what made me faint. He looked just the same, too—a straw hat and a military cloak wrapped around him; he was a Southern officer."

"And you saw him jest now?" Nathan questioned. He was a strong-headed, level-minded, practical Yankee, and no believer in ghosts.

"Yas, right down the street there," and Embden indicated the left-hand side of the road as he spoke.

"Say, squire, if you'll mind the horse, I'll find out what it is or bust!" cried Nathan, with an air of determination.

"Yas, do!" the old man cried, eagerly.

So Nathan stopped the horse, gave the reins into Embden's hand, jumped out, and walked quickly down the street.

Two dark figures stood on a corner, conversing together.

As Nathan passed, he saw that they were two of the mill-girls.

Nathan walked on for full five minutes, but with the exception of the two girls standing on the corner, not a single soul did he see.

"I guess the old buttons is crazy, anyway," he said, as he halted and looked around him. "There ain't a man with a straw hat on 'bout these parts. I guess I'd better get him home as soon as I can."

And, acting, on this determination, Nathan returned at once and got into the buggy.

"Did you see him?" the old man asked earnestly.

"There ain't nobody in the street, 'cept two girls," Nathan replied, as he took up the reins and started the horse.

"His face is fair—he does look like a woman," the old man muttered.

"Does he wear petticoats?"

"No, no, of course not!"

"Wal, I didn't see him, and I guess you didn't nuther. I only saw two girls who work in one of the mills. I know both of 'em by sight well enough."

"I saw him as sure as I set here, Nathan!" Embden vowed, earnestly.

Nathan saw that it would be useless to attempt to reason with the old man, so he drove homeward as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LYDIA'S SECRET.

IN a little, low one-story cottage in the outskirts of Saco, on the Portland road, dwelt Dinah Salisbury; Aunt Dinah, as she was known far and wide.

Our readers will remember her as the colored woman with the "yaller" dog who rescued Lydia Grame from her snowy shroud in the streets of Boston, as related in our first chapter.

Aunt Dinah made a comfortable living as a washerwoman, and the careful housewives of the twin cities praised her skill highly.

The old woman, her daily toil done, had just sat down to enjoy a cup of tea, when the dog, who had been quietly reposing on the hearth in front of the stove, raised his head, looked toward the door, and by his actions indicated as plainly as by words, that some one was coming.

"Somebody comin', eh?" the old woman questioned, rising from her seat. The dog wagged his tail at the sound of his mistress's voice.

"It's somebody that the dog knows for sure, or he'd done bark long ago," the old woman said, reflectively.

Then there came a gentle tap at the door. The old aunt opened it and Lydia Grame entered.

"Bress de Lord!" the old woman cried, in delight; "why, chile, is dat you?"

And the dog rose from his place by the hearth and came up to Lydia, wagging his tail in token of amity.

The girl was dressed plainly; a dark waterproof cloak covered her form from head to foot, and she wore a light chip hat, sailor-fashion.

"I thought that I would come and see you, aunty," Lydia said, and there was a troubled expression upon her beautiful face as she spoke.

"Dat's right, chile; I'se glad dat you hain't forgotten yer old aunty."

"I have too few friends to forget any of them," the girl spoke sadly.

"Lor', honey, ye musn't speak dat way!" rejoined the old woman, caressingly. "You's got more friends dan any oder gal dat works in de mill. Everybody likes you, chile. But, I

'specks you's in trouble, honey; yer don't look well. Jis' sit down an' take a cup of tea an' tell yer ole aunty w'at's de matter wid ye."

And the old woman, bustling about the room, placed a chair for the girl at the table. Lydia sat down, first removing her cloak and hat. It was plain from the expression upon the girl's features that she was much troubled.

"I've had supper, aunty," she said, as the old woman poured out a cup of tea for her.

"Nebber mind dat, chile; jis' you drink a cup of yer aunty's tea. Yer don't git such tea as dat everywhar, an' jes' try a bit of dat toast. See how glad dat fool dog is to see you! I nebber see'd any t'ing like dat afore." And the old woman laughed heartily as she beheld the dog frisking around the visitor, eager to receive a friendly word from her.

"Poor doggie," Lydia said, patting the dog's shaggy head with her soft, white hand. The dumb brute's joy at seeing her made the heart of the girl feel less wretched. The cold touch of the animal's nose rubbing against her hand seemed full of sympathy.

"Now, honey, jes' you tole me w'at de matter is," the old negress persisted, sitting down to the table opposite to the girl.

"I hardly know now to tell you, aunty," she said, after a few moments of thought.

"Don't be skeered now, chile, for to tell yer old aunty all 'bout it. I'se lived a heap of years longer in dis world dan you have, an' p'haps I kin help yer out."

"Aunty, I am very miserable!" Lydia exclaimed, impulsively.

"What come to yer, chile?" asked the old woman, in astonishment.

"Aunty, I want you to advise me what to do. I can speak freely to you, for you are the only friend that I have in the world. But for you I should have died in the snow-bank where you found me in Boston. Perhaps it would have been better for me if you had heeded my wish and left me to die, instead of bringing me here," the girl said, impulsively, tears standing in the large dark eyes, and a look of misery plainly written on her features.

"Why, chile!" cried the old woman, in horror, "you musn't talk dat way; dat's wicked, dat is! A young gal like you to want to die! Lordy! dat's ag'in' natur." Now, honey, you musn't talk like dat ag'in'."

"But, aunty, I am so miserable," the girl rejoined, sadly.

"W'at's de matter, chile? Has yer quarreled wid yer young man?" asked the old woman, shrewdly.

A little red spot came into Lydia's pale cheeks, and she let her gaze rest on the floor for a moment.

"Why don't you say, chile? You ain't afeard to trust yer old aunty, are you?"

"No, no," Lydia replied, quickly; "but how did you know that any gentleman was paying attentions to me?"

"Lordy, chile, the folks round hyer will talk, ye know."

"And do they say that any gentleman is paying attentions to me?"

"I 'specks they do; I heerd 'em."

"And who was the gentleman?"

"Dat Sinclair Paxton, honey, an' he ain't no poor white trash," the old woman said, emphatically.

For a few moments Lydia was silent; as she had suspected, Sinclair's attentions to her had been noticed, and already people had begun to couple their names together.

"And do they say that a rich man like Mr. Paxton thinks of marrying a poor girl like myself?" she asked.

"Yes, honey. Yer ain't had a quarrel wid him?"

"No, no, but it is to ask your advice in regard to Mr. Paxton that I came to see you to-night."

"Dat's right, honey; I'll do de best I kin for you," the old woman observed, encouragingly.

"Mr. Paxton has been very kind to me ever since I came to the mill; he is the treasurer there, you know?"

The old woman nodded.

"And he has told me that he loves me and that he wishes me to become his wife."

"Dat's w'at I'd like to see, honey!" the old woman exclaimed, exultantly. "Fore de Lord! I'd walk a hundred miles fur to see dat!"

"But, aunty, suppose I can't be his wife?"

Dinah stared at her for a moment in astonishment.

"Why not, chile? dat's w'at I'd like to know!"

"He is a rich man while I am only a poor girl—"

"Dat's nuffin'—dat don't count, nohow!"

"But, if there is another reason?" Lydia added, and then she hesitated as if undecided whether to go on or stop. Then with a sudden movement, she set her lips tight together for a moment and the look of hesitation vanished.

"Aunty, I must speak plainly with you, for you are the only one in this world to whom I can go for counsel. There is a reason why I should not marry Sinclair Paxton. There is a man living, who, if I marry Mr. Paxton, would hold me absolutely in his power. I should be his slave, obliged to do his will, and if my husband by any chance should happen to discover my unhappy secret, he might drive me from him with curses—with loathing, and I should deserve to be so treated."

"Bress de Lord, chile!" exclaimed the old woman, in astonishment, "I don't understand dis yer."

"And I can not fully explain, except that there is a dark secret connected with my early life. It was that secret pressing on my brain and driving me almost to madness that made me seek death in the snow-bank from which you rescued me. Now, aunty, I'll tell you what I came to ask. This man who possesses such a terrible hold upon me, knows of Mr. Paxton's love for me. He has offered that if I will give him a certain sum of money he will go away, so that I can marry Mr. Paxton, and promised that I shall never see him again. Now, aunty, is it right for me to do this—to marry this gentleman, knowing as I do, that if this man does not keep his word and should return, I doom both my husband and myself to a lifetime of misery?"

"An' can't yer tell Mister Paxton all 'bout dis yer thing?" the old woman asked, thoughtfully.

"No; I can not tell him, for if he knew my secret, our marriage would be impossible," Lydia replied, slowly.

"Don't you have nuffin' to do wid him, then, honey; dat ain't right; dat ain't 'cordin' to de Good Book; don't you do it, chile!" the negress said, decidedly.

"That is what my own heart has told me a hundred times, but I am so weak, so irresolute, and this man loves me so well. When I am with him I think that I could dare every thing—risk all for his sake!" Lydia said, hurriedly and in strange excitement.

"Don't you do it, honey! Act fa'r an' squar'; dat's de only way to git along in dis yere world."

"You are right! He must forget me and I must forget him, and may Heaven give us both strength to bear our cross. Well, I must say good-by, aunty," and Lydia rose and put on her things. "I must go, now. It is getting dark, and it is a long way home."

"Come again soon, honey."

"Yes, yes," and Lydia hurried away.

On her homeward walk she passed by the Paxton mansion. A single glance she gave at the house, almost hid by the gloom of the evening, and then hurried on again, her face as white and stony as the face of a marble statue.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DADDY EMBDEN'S GHOST.

WHEN the buggy driven by Nathan, drew up in front of the Embden mansion, the old man was so completely unnerved, that Nathan had to take him from the carriage as if he had been a child.

Delia had been on the look-out for her father's return, and when the buggy halted, she came out on the steps.

"Oh, father, you are sick!" she said.

"No, I ain't sick," he muttered slowly, as with the aid of her arm, he tottered, with unsteady steps, into the house. Nathan followed close behind.

Delia led the old man into the sitting-room, placed him in an arm-chair, then in response to Nathan's beckoning hand, she came to the door which led into the hall where the hired man stood.

"What is the matter with father?" she asked, sorely troubled at the condition of the old man.

"Wal, Delie, it's hard to say," Nathan replied, slowly. "I drove up to the deacon's house, and got there jest about nine, jest as you told me. And arter I got there I thought I had better go into the house and let your father know that I was there. So I got out of the wagon, and I walked into the yard. I tumbled over some-thin' all curled into a heap on the ground. I thought furst that it was some feller who had been drinking too much rum and had straggled into deacon's yard to sleep it off. But when I come to examine, I found that it was your fa-

"I put him into the buggy and he talked all the time as crazy as a leech: I couldn't make head or tail of it at first, but arter we drove on a spell, I found out that he thought that he had seen a ghost."

"A ghost!" cried the girl in wonder.

"Sartin! a ghost wrapped up in a military cloak and wearing a straw hat."

"But did he see any thing?"

"Wal, now, furst off, I thought mebbe that he had seen somebody passing in the street, who looked like somebody that he once knew, and who was dead. But arter we got over the bridge and was coming up the hill, he dropped down in a faint ag'in, and when I roused him out of it, he said that he had seen the ghost ag'in."

"But did you see any thing?"

"Not a thing; and when I found out what ailed him, I jumped right out of the buggy and went back, but I couldn't see any thing at all, except a couple of girls standing talking on a corner of the street."

"Then you think that father did not really see any thing, and that the ghost is only in his imagination?" the girl asked, thoughtfully.

"That's just what I think. I don't believe in ghosts, anyway; I never see'd but one, and that turned out to be dad's white cow."

"Oh, what shall I do with him?" cried the girl, wringing her hands in despair.

"Wal, if I was you, now, Delie," Nathan said, confidently, "the first thing I'd do would be to go and mix him up a stiff, hot rum punch. Your daddy's been a sailor, you know, and hot rum comes kinder natural to 'em. Then I'd get him out to bed."

"Yes, I will do so."

"I'll put the horse up, then I'll come in and talk to him; but I tell you he's as cranky as all git-out."

Then Nathan departed, while Delia returned to her father.

The old man was sitting in the easy-chair, with his head resting on the table, and hidden by his hand.

"Don't you feel well, father?" the girl asked, approaching and kneeling down by his chair.

With a nervous motion, Embden raised his head and looked carefully around the room before he spoke.

"I'm sick at heart, Delie; that's where I'm sick," he said, slowly.

"Shan't I mix you some hot rum, father?"

"Yas, yas," he replied, quickly; "I want somethin' to steady my nerves; I'm only a wrack, now."

So Delia went and prepared the hot drink, which the old man sipped eagerly.

"That's what your mother used to fix up for me," he said, slowly and reflectively, while a tear stood in his eye. "Many's the squally night I've managed to run in after a hard north-east blow and found your mother sitting up and waiting for me. If she had only lived I never would have done it; but the devil fished for my soul; he baited his hook with a great lot of money, and he caught hold of me, poor sinner that I am. The deacon says, too, that I'll roast in hell-fire. Oh Lord!" and the old man groaned aloud in misery.

The girl had listened in utter amazement to the strange words which had fallen from her father's lips.

"Why, father, how could the deacon say such a cruel thing as that to you?" she asked in wonder.

"He didn't know that it was me, Delie," the old man moaned. "The deacon has known me man and boy for forty years. He never know me to wrong anybody out of a penny. The Biddeford folks used to say, 'Skipper Embden's a hard man at a bargain, but he's honest to a cent, and only wants what's coming to him.' There wasn't a man, woman or child from Boston to the Kennebec that wouldn't trust the skipper of the Nancy Jane; they wouldn't believe now that I was a thief, and a red-handed murderer."

"Oh, father!" cried the girl, with tears in her eyes, "you mustn't say such dreadful things."

"But it's truth, gal. Oh, I'm a dreadful man!" and Embden moaned in agony.

"Now, father, don't speak that way," Delia said, caressingly; "why, if any one should hear you speak like that they would surely think that you were crazy."

"Oh, if I could only think so!" the old man muttered; "if I could only make myself believe that I was crazy on that dreadful night. Oh, how it all comes back to me. I kin see it now, just as plain as I did then. Arter he was dead, he followed me down the river, and as I

looked over the stern, I see'd him a-floating on his back, and a-staring up at me, as much as to say, 'I'll never leave you, and he never has, really, for I see him all the time, no matter where I am.'"

"Why don't you try and think of something else, father?" the girl said, coaxingly.

"Yes, I know," the old man said, shaking his head sorrowfully. "You think that I don't know what I'm talking about, but I do; I ain't crazy. The deacon knew that I wasn't crazy. He knelt down and prayed for me, poor sinner that I am. I felt better arter I heard him pray. It kinder lifted my soul up. I kinder thought how my mother used to pray for me when I was running round, a barefooted boy. It's putty hard for a God-fearing man, who has lived an honest life for forty years, to turn all of a sudden into a pesky villain. The deacon says I must give it all up, and so I will, but, oh, Lord! I can't bring back the life that's gone. We can take it away, but we can't restore it."

"Now, father, try and don't talk this way," and the girl smoothed back the bristly hair of the old man caressingly.

"I know you think I'm wrong; Nathan thought that I was crazy to-night when I said that I saw it on the street."

"What, father?"

"The ghost."

"But whose ghost?"

"Why, the man who floated down the Rap-pahannock."

All this was a mystery to the girl. One thing only was plain to her, and that was that her father was laboring under the pressure of a strong mental excitement.

"Was the man dead?"

"Yes, of course he was dead; he couldn't a-floated ef he hadn't been dead."

"And you saw him to-night?"

"Jest as plain as I see you, Delie," the old man said, solemnly. "I was coming out of the deacon's house, half-way 'cross the yard, mebbe, and I happened to raise my eyes and look out into the street over the gate, and there he stood, jest the other side of the gate. He was a-looking at me—right straight at me—and his face was jest as pale as death, and his eyes they looked like great balls of fire. He never moved a mite, only stood and looked at me."

"But are you sure, father, that it wasn't somebody passing by who happened to bear a resemblance to the person whom you think it was? It was dark, wasn't it, father?"

"Yas, a leetle dark."

"Well, in the dark you might have made a mistake."

"Yas, but I saw it again, Delie," he said, not at all convinced.

"When was that?"

"Arter we crossed the bridge, and was driving up the hill. I was a-looking 'round 'cos I thought that he would foller me, and jest as we were going up the hill, he came right out of a dark shadow, right side of the buggy; rose, you know, as ghosts do, right out of the air."

"But, what became of him?" the girl asked, unable to decide whether her father was laboring under a delusion or not.

"I don't know," the old man said, doubtfully; "I went down all in a heap at the bottom of the buggy."

"But Nathan said that he got out and then couldn't see anything or anybody."

"'Cos I'm the only one it appears to. Everybody can't see ghosts. It's only wretched sinners like I am," and the old man groaned in bitterness of spirit.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SKIPPER'S CONFESSION.

NATHAN'S entrance into the room interrupted the conversation.

"Wal, cap'n, how do you feel now?" he asked.

"Putty poorly, Nathan," the old man answered, slowly.

"I'm 'tarnel sorry; can't I do somethin' for you? Shan't I go for a doctor?"

"I'm afeared that a doctor wouldn't do me much good," Embden said, sorrowfully.

"Wal, I don't have much faith in them and in their nasty stuff myself," Nathan said. "I never could understand why medicines that a feller takes to do him good should allers pucker his insides all up. Now, squire, ef I were you, I'd take two or three hot rum punches and go to bed. I guess that the rum will make your head swim round so that, if a ghost does come, you'll see about six of 'em." And after this advice the hired man departed.

"Let's go up-stairs, Delie," the old man said, suddenly, after quite a long pause. "I want

you to hear all about it; my mind will be easier then."

Assisted by his daughter, the old man crept slowly up the stairs to his own room—a front chamber on the second story.

Delia lit the gas, brought a rocking-chair for her father, and a common chair for herself, which she placed by the side of her father's.

"Now, Delie, I'm jist a-goin' to tell you what a wicked, wretched man you've got for a father," the old man said, solemnly.

"Why, father!" the girl exclaimed, looking, with a beaming smile and eyes full of love, into her father's face, "if you keep on saying such dreadful things, I shall begin to think that there is really something the matter with your head."

"Tain't the head, Delie; it's the heart that troubles me," Embden said, with a hollow groan.

"Now, father, as I've told you all along, you mustn't think of such disagreeable things."

"Delie, dear, when the devil gets hold of a man, he don't give him much peace."

"Oh, father!"

"It's the truth. I feel that I'm on an on-sartin sea; there's rocks all around, and there's no tellin' how soon the ship will strike on the reef and all hands go down. When I sailed the Nancy Jane, and it come on to blow a stiff north-easter, with an ugly chopping sea, I could ask the Lord with a free heart to take the little coasting smack under his protection and carry skipper Embden back to his old woman and little gal in Biddeford, but I can't do it now. I've tried to pray a dozen times, but the words don't come out freely; they kinder stick on the way. The deacon prayed for me to-night, and I jined in. It took a weight right off my heart. I've been tryin' to cheat myself that every thing was all right; that I'd acted fair and honest, and that my account was square before the Lord; but the deacon he jest waded in and made me see what an awful sinner I am and how good my chance is to go down to the bottomless pit hereafter. I'm going to tell you all about it, Delie, and then afore I go to bed, I'm going to wrastle with the devil for my soul. I kept it pure and good for forty years, and that ought to count a little for me now."

The girl was perplexed; her father's manner showed no evidence of insanity, yet she could not understand why he should talk so strangely.

There was quite a long silence. Embden was breathing heavily, but he seemed much more composed than he had been.

"Now, Delie, jest you listen to me 'tentively," the old captain enjoined.

The girl, her arm resting upon her father's knee, looked up into his face with earnest interest.

"You remember, Delie, arter your mother's death, I kissed you good-by, told you I was going on a long cruise, and sailed the Nancy Jane out of the harbor?"

"Yes, I remember, father."

"And you never heered a word of me, or from me, till I come back to Biddeford and told you that I was a rich man."

The girl nodded.

"You don't know where I sailed to, nor anybody else; you don't know where I made my money, or anybody else. When they asked me questions, I told 'em that I had sold the Nancy Jane, and had speculated in ile. But it wa'n't the truth, Delie. There was something on my hands that stuck to 'em as tight as ile and smelt a good deal worse. When I left Biddeford, I sailed right straight for the capes of Virginia. I met a man about two months before in Bostin, who was a secret agent for the Southerners. He was buying medicine, caps and sich things for the South, and he wanted a little smack like mine to run the blockade with. So he and I made a bargain. It warn't right, Delie, for me, a Northern man, to go ag'in my own side and help the other, but I wanted money bad. I had been a-sailing that Nancy Jane up and down the coast for many a long year, and somehow I couldn't get forebanded with the world. Wal, he offered me a big price ef I'd do what he wanted, so I asked Jethro—he was my man, you know—and he said he was willing to risk it, and so we went into the speculation."

"Arter we got into Virginian waters we used to get our cargo somewhere on the eastern shore of Maryland and run over at night in some of the Virginian creeks and land it."

"I s'pose we run the blockade for nigh a year and never got overhauled by the Federals. Then things commenced to look squally for the South. Grant was hammering away at Lee's army like all possessed. They couldn't shake him

off; and putty soon I could see with half an eye that the Confeds were beginning to think that the bottom would soon fall out. I had carried sealed packets two or three times from Maryland addressed to a 'Mr. White.' These packets had leaden seals attached to each corner, so that, in case that a gunboat captured me, I could throw them overboard and they would sink at once.

"This Mr. White, who was a good-looking man, with a smooth, boyish face, about thirty-five or forty—I should think, though he didn't look to be over twenty-five—allers received the packet in person. I had a notion the first time that I saw him that he was some high officer of the Confeds. Wal, it was just arter the battles of the Wilderness that I carried a larger package than usual over to this Mr. White. This time he opened the package right before me. We were standing at the time under a clump of trees 'bout forty feet from the shore. He didn't appear at all satisfied with the letters that the sealed packet contained, and I heard him mutter, two or three times, 'It is no use; the end must come. It's only a question of time now.' Wal, I kinder guessed that he meant the Fed'als was going to get the best of it.

"All of a sudden he turned to me and said, 'That's a neat little craft of yours, skipper.' 'Putty fair,' I answered. Then he looked at the smack and appeared to be thinking 'bout something. 'Will she stand much sea?—could you sail from here to New York in her?' he asked. 'I guess so,' I said, 'seeing as how I sailed her right straight from Nantucket to Cape Charles.' Then he looked at the smack again, and then he looked me all over. 'Skipper,' he said, in his quick, short way, 'are you a rich man?' I told him I hadn't any more money than I could take care of.

"Then ag'in he looked at the smack, and then ag'in he looked at me. 'Would you like to make a thousand dollars?' he asked.

"Wal now, Delie, a thousand dollars was a putty big sum to me; so I jest up an' told him that ef he wanted to pay any skipper a thousand dollars, I was his man.

"Then he looked at the smack ag'in and seemed to be measuring her all over with his eyes.

"Will she carry a weight of six or seven hundred?' he asked. I told him that she was good for six or seven ton.

"That will do then,' he cried out; 'I'll give you a thousand dollars to carry me and my baggage from here to New York.' I accepted the offer on the jump, and we arranged that the baggage was to arrive the night arter, be put on board, and then we war to lay in the stream and wait for him, as he didn't expect he could come till near morning."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BETRAYAL.

"WAL, in the afternoon a colored man drove a fight wagon down to the beach. In the wagon was the baggage of my passenger. There was a light sole-leather trunk and about twenty small boxes, marked 'lead.' Of course I naturally wondered what on earth my passenger wanted of so much lead. I said as much to the colored man, and he replied that it war to make bullets. Now as my passenger had contracted to be taken to New York, I couldn't see what use the bullets could be to him there. But I didn't say anything more about it, and got the baggage on board. Before the wagon came, I had sent Jethro inland to watch the road, so that he might give me warning if anybody came. There was a Confederate picket about four miles inland, and I didn't know but some of them might take a notion into their heads to straggle down to the beach. You see, Delie, I kinder thought I had diskivered what my passenger war up to. I knew that he were some high officer of the Confederacy, an' I suspicioned that he had come to the conclusion that the war was pretty nigh over, and that he had better get out while he could.

"Arter the trunk an' the boxes were put on board, the colored man drove off. I got into the skiff and pulled off to the smack. I had piled the boxes all up together in the stern an' kivered 'em over with a piece of sail. The trunk was dumped down side of 'em, standing on end.

"I climbed on board the smack an' set down on the edge of the cabin. There I sot, an' there I thought. I looked at the boxes jest as if my eyes had been gimlets to bore right through the sail, wood an' all. I knew that it wasn't lead that war in the boxes, an' I 'spicioned that it war gold. I felt sure of it. There on board of my little smack, right afore my eyes, war a fortune. An' as I sot there an' thought, I see'd

somehin' valler lying on the deck by the side of the trunk. I took a good look at it, and diskivered that it war an envelope. Then I went an' picked it up. The hasp of the trunk had snapped, an' it were only fastened by the straps, so the envelope had slipped out. Inside the envelope was a letter—the envelope wasn't sealed. It was directed to Maxwell Dallis, Lynchburg, Virginia. I opened and read it." Then the old man rose from his seat and went to a little old-fashioned trunk, covered with cowhide—the hair still on—and studded with brass nails, which stood in one corner of the room. He opened the trunk and took a letter, in a yellow envelope, from a hiding-place which had been made by tearing the paper lining of the trunk a little, thus forming a sort of a pocket.

He returned to his seat and gave the envelope into the hand of the girl.

She saw that it was addressed in a bold, firm hand to "Maxwell Dallis, Esq., Lynchburg, Virginia."

"That's the letter I picked up from the deck of the smack," he said. "That's the letter which put it into my head to do what I did. Read it aloud, Delie."

The girl drew the letter from the envelope, unfolded it and read aloud:

"MY DEAR MAXWELL:

"The end cometh very rapidly. The capture of Richmond is now only a question of time. Grant has got Lee by the throat and is holding on like a bulldog. We whip the Federals in every fight, but each day finds them still nearer to Richmond. We are being crushed by numbers. If we could give Lee fifty thousand fresh troops all would be well, but that is simply impossible. Sherman is following Johnson up so closely along the coast-line that he can not spare a man—Johnson I mean—and is not strong enough to offer battle; he can only retreat and impede the enemy's advance. In my opinion the fatal mistake was made when we removed Johnson to the west and allowed Hood to butt his head against the Nashville fortifications. Every thing has gone wrong since. But this is all history now, and it is useless to discuss it. You already know my opinion of our chief and his advisers. I have risked and lost all for my native State, and now that I perceive the cry will soon be, 'Sauve qui peut' (save himself who can) I intend to act at once. I have turned all my effects into portable shape and have arranged with the captain of a little blockade-runner to convey me to New York. There I shall take steamer at once for Europe. The very boldness of the plan will I think insure its success. I have arranged for Pet to join me in New York. So, my dear Maxwell, when you hear that I have suddenly disappeared, and are compelled to listen to the howl which will come from a certain pack of hounds, console yourself with the reflection that, when the day of disaster comes, I shall not have to bow the knee to the men whom I have fought for four years, not in the field, true, but in the council-chamber. When our children in after time shall read the history of our glorious struggle, what reproaches will be heaped upon the heads of the narrow-minded bigots, who, as leaders, ruined the cause of the Southland! Will write you from New York.

"Yours truly,

"GLYN DALLIS."

"That's the letter that told me who my passenger was. I had often heard of him. I sot upon the edge of my cabin an' I looked at the sail which covered the boxes. Only three men in the world knew that they were aboard the smack; myself, the owner, an' the colored man. I sot there, an' I thought the matter all over. I kin remember jest how I thought an' what I thought, jest as if it were yesterday. There was a lot of money on board my little smack. The owner of the money was an enemy to my country, an' now he was running away from his. All I had to do was to go to the Confederate picket an' jest tell 'em that at twelve o'clock that night he would come down to the beach. I needn't say a word about the boxes an' the trunk on board of the smack. I could h'ist sail an' go down the river an' the money was all mine."

The girl listened with a beating heart to her father's words; she fully comprehended how great the temptation had been.

"And did you go to the soldiers?" the girl asked, at length, in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"I r'ally did," the old man moaned. "I was only a poor weak sinner an' the money was too much for me. I sot there a-looking at the boxes kivered with the sail, an' the devil kept whispering in my ear that they would all be mine if I only went on shore an' said a dozen words or so to the sodgers. At last I yielded; I pulled my hat down over my eyes, an' I jumped into the boat an' pulled to the shore. I called Jethro an' told him to stay an' mind the skiff, that I would be back soon, an' then I put for the interior. It was a long walk, that four miles to where the picket was posted, clos' to the edge of a swamp, but it didn't seem to me

as if I was ten min'tes goin' it. An' all the way along the devil an' the good old New England spirit were having a reg'lar tussle in my soul. But the devil was too strong: he had me, poor miserable sinner that I was, tight in his clutches.

"When I reached the picket post, I found a Confederate colonel there that I had met two or three times before. He had come down to the beach and superintended unloading when I had had a heavy cargo. So I took him to one side an' told him about the bargain that I had made. He was a cold, cruel-looking man, this officer, an' his eyes seemed to fairly be on fire as he listened to me.

"Glyn Dallis, rat-like, is going to leave the sinking ship, eh?" he muttered.

"Yes," I said.

"My fine fellow, you've done quite right in coming to me with this information," and he slapped me on the shoulder. "If it was anybody else, I don't think I should trouble my head much about it. But he's one of these high-toned Virginian gentlemen, one of the Randolphs of Roanoke. I owe him a grudge. He thought I wasn't good enough for his daughter, and the dainty Miss turned up her nose at me. Now I'll pay off the debt."

"Then he told me that I must go ahead, jest the same as if I had not said anything about my passenger's coming—that he would arrange every thing all right. Of course I didn't say anything to the officer about the boxes and the trunk which I had put on board.

"The road to the picket-post seemed very short, but the way back to the beach seemed more like ten miles than four. It was quite dark when I got on board the smack. Jethro wondered at the boxes, because we never used to carry any cargo back.

"Oh, Delie, you can't guess how I felt that night as I sat counting the hours and waiting for midnight to come!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

DOWN THE RAPPAHANNOCK.

THE old man bowed his head in his hands and groaned aloud; the remembrance of the fatal night when he had yielded to temptation and bartered his soul for gold, was as fresh in his memory as if it had been but yesterday.

Delia did not speak; she rested her head upon her father's knee, and the great tears came slowly into the sharp blue eyes.

At length the old man went on with his confession:

"The night was very dark; there wasn't a star to be seen in the sky and no moon. Leetle by leetle the shore faded into the gloom, until at last a great black cloud seemed to settle right down onto us. The smack was a-heaving up an' down, tugging at the anchor jest as if it was a living thing in a hurry to get off. The tide had turned about half-past five, and the flood-tide was setting in strong from the bay. I had arranged with my passenger that he was to give me a signal from the pint, and then I was to pull to the beach in the skiff and take him on board. I was to signal to him with my lantern in return, so that he should know that it was all right, an' that I was a-coming. So, Jethro an' I sat on the smack an' waited. Jethro noticed that I seemed out of sorts, an' asked me if I wasn't sick. I never knew how hard it was to lie, till then. Of course he didn't know anything of what was coming. I told him that I was waiting a message from the shore which I expected would come about twelve, an' then we'd up anchor an' put. Finally, Jethro said he was sleepy, so he crawled into the cabin an' laid down. An' I sot there all alone; I could hear Jethro snoring away like a steam-engine, an' the swash of the waves as they came ag'in' the side of the smack. The wind had freshened up an' it was blowing pretty stiff; the smack was pitching up an' down, an' it looked as if there was a chance of having a pretty smart blow.

"At last half-past eleven came. I woke Jethro up an' got the lantern all ready to give the signal. The hours that I had waited while Jethro was curled up in the cabin asleep had seemed pretty long, but that leetle half-hour up to twelve o'clock seemed 'bout as long as all the rest put together.

"The last time I looked at my watch it wanted jest a minute to twelve, Jethro was at the anchor, all ready to haul up at the word, an' I had the lantern kivered up in a piece of sail, to give the signal."

"I had hardly got my watch back to my pocket when I saw the light on the pint—a-giving the signal. I was to show my light twice in answer."

"Wal, I answered the signal, an' jest as I flashed the light a second time over the water, up went a rocket right back of the p'int. You see, Delie, I had arranged with the Confederate colonel that the same signal which told my passenger all was right, was also a signal for the soldiers to go for him.

"The moment I saw the rocket shoot up in the air, I yelled to Jethro that there was something wrong, an' for to take up anchor an' let her sliver.

"The ebb-tide had set in strong an' the stream was a-jest rushing down the bay. No sooner had the anchor left the bottom than the smack slid along with the tide. I up with the sail as soon as I could, An' jest as I got her half-way up, there come two shots from the p'int, an' then a whole volley of musketry. When I heard it, it made my blood run cold, an' I almost let the sail go right slap back to the deck, but, someway, I managed to hold on.

"I got the sails up an' headed the smack down the river. There wasn't a sound from the shore arter the musketry, an' the fust thing I knew I caught myself praying that my passenger had escaped though I was fearful that he hadn't.

"I headed the smack straight for the bay. 'Twas 'bout four o'clock in the morning, I reckon, when I got down near the mouth of the river, an' there, right ahead of me, anchored in the stream, was a Federal gunboat, right off Windmill P'int.

I saw at once that 'twas no use trying to steal past, for it was gittin' lighter an' lighter every minute; so I jest run in behind a wooded p'int in a little cove that there was there, an' made up my mind to lay hid until the gunboat got out of the way. I run the smack in clos' to shore, an' then, as I hadn't had a wink of sleep, I crawled into the cabin an' laid down. But, Delie, I might jest as well laid awake, for all the good that sleep did me. I dreamed every thing all over ag'in, an' more too, for in my dream I went on shore an' saw the fight there atween my passenger and the sogers. I saw him go down, shot to pieces by the muskets, an' saw the red blood a-streaming all over his pale face. I tried to run away, but I couldn't run; the airth seemed to give way right under my steps, so that I couldn't get ahead any.

"I s'pose I slept in this horrible way for 'bout four hours, when Jethro put his head into the cabin an' called me.

"'Cap'n,' says he, 'here's somethin' awful out here!'

"I got up an' crawled out, an' there, floating down on the tide, in a pile of driftwood, was the dead body of my passenger. Oh, Delie! I kin see it now jest as plain as I did then. He was floating on his back, and his white face, with a leetle red wound in his temple, was turned up to the sky. I jest looked at it a min'te an' then I went over in a fit. When I come to myself, Jethro was a-bending over me an' pouring whisky down my throat. The dreadful thing had gone on with the tide.

"Jethro said that I had raved like all possessed, an' I saw that he hadn't any idea that it was through me that the man had been killed.

"The gunboat went up the stream in the afternoon, an' jest as soon as it commenced to git dark, I up sail and ran across the bay. There was a leetle village on the western shore of Maryland where I had been used to make a landing, an' I ran straight for it jest as if I was a-going to land my cargo there. You see, Delie, it was necessary to get rid of Jethro, 'cos if I sailed straight for New York, as I intended to do, he would had a suspicion that there was somethin' wrong. It was 'bout three in the morning when we ran into the Maryland shore. I told Jethro that he had better get into the skiff an' pull in to the beach for to see if everything was all right. I pretended to be afeard that there might be some of the Federal soldiers there. He knew exactly where to go, for the Confederate agent lived clus' to the beach.

"An' as soon, Delie, as he was fairly out of sight, hid in the gloom, I up sail and scooted down the bay. I knew that Jethro would nat'rally think that I had been frightened off by some gunboat.

"I sailed straight for New York, an' there I emugled the trunk an' boxes on shore without any one having any suspicions of how valuable a cargo I had on board the Nancy Jane. Jest as I thought, the boxes were full of gold, and the trunk had a large lot of greenbacks and Government bonds in it. Altogether, there was a leetle over eighty-one thousand dollars. I sold the gold and the bonds leetle by leetle, an' I came back to Biddeford a rich man. But since that night when I saw the rocket go up an' heard the report of the muskets, I hain't had a

min'te's peace. I dream the whole thing over an' over every time I go to sleep, an' to-night, Delie, as I came out of Deacon Paxton's house, I saw this dead Mr. Dallis rise up out of the airth. I know what it means. I ain't got long to live. He comes for me clean out of the salt ocean," and the old man moaned pitifully.

"No, no, father, that is not possible," the daughter said, gently; "the dead cannot return."

"And the deacon, too, said that I would roast in hell fire for what I've done."

"But, you have repented, father, and all the rest of your life you will pray that you may be forgiven."

"I know I ain't got long to live," the old man muttered; "he came to-night to tell me so."

"That is only your fancy, father."

"No, no, it ain't," he persisted; "I tell you, Delie, I saw him jest as plain as I see you now. I knew him the min'te I looked at him, although he don't look as old as he did when he was alive."

"Father, you must give up this money," the girl said, suddenly.

"Yes, I s'pose so; but I don't know who it belongs to. I've had it on my mind for a long time that I ought to give it up, an' pay reg'lar legal interest for the use on it for the time I've had it."

"This Mr. Dallis must have relatives," the girl said, thoughtfully; "I will write to this Mr. Maxwell Dallis, at Lynchburg, Virginia, to whom the letter was directed. I guess that he is a relation. He can tell us something about it."

"But, Delie, how kin you live without this wicked money?" he asked, sorrowfully.

"How did I live before?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh, father, I would far rather live on bread and water, and know that I got it honestly, than live in this splendid house and know that it belongs by rights to some one else."

Emlden looked at the girl in amazement; her strong will was as a staff for his feeble hand.

That night the old man slept better than he had since the time he floated in the Nancy Jane down the Rappahannock.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

ANOTHER week had come and gone, and during that week the good folks of Biddeford had fresh cause for wonder.

Daddy Emlden had sold his big house on the hill and had taken the same little cottage where his wife and daughter had formerly lived when he had sailed the Nancy Jane up and down the coast, laden with market truck.

And Delia Emlden had visited all the families for whom she had formerly sewed, and had said that she would be very glad to receive their work again.

A month before, the question had been, "How did Daddy Emlden make his money?" Now the query had changed, and "What has Daddy Emlden done with his fortune?" became the cry.

By many a shrewd and skillfully put question the more curious of the village folks strove to extract the truth from Delia, but the girl, with her Yankee cunning, was fully a match for the questioners, and they gained but little information from her evasive answers.

One man alone of all the good people of Biddeford or Saco suspected the truth, and he kept his knowledge to himself. That man was Deacon Paxton.

It was the night before the Fourth of July. The day had been very warm, but the cool breeze, fresh from the ocean, came with the duskiess of the twilight and had tempered the heated air.

Down one of the little back streets of the town the clerk of the grocery store, Jerry Gardner, was proceeding slowly along. He halted in front of a modest two-story cottage, which sat back from the street, a little garden in front of it.

"I guess this is the house," he said, opening the gate which led into the garden. He had not taken three steps up the walk which led to the house, when the front door of the cottage opened suddenly and Delia Emlden came running out to meet her visitor.

"I'm so glad you've come!" she exclaimed, extending both hands to him, and holding up her lips to be kissed.

"Wal, I swow!" Jerry cried, in astonishment, but he did not omit to kiss the red lips so temptingly offered to him; "looks as if you was glad to see a feller!"

"Well, I am," replied the girl, promptly; "don't you like to have me show it?"

"Sartin; but it seems kinder strange, you know. It's been a pretty long time since we were on kissing terms, Delie."

"Yes, I know it, but, now, please, don't say anything to make me feel mean. I've already told you how bad I've been, and you yourself shall see how good I mean to be in the future. But, why haven't you been to see me before?"

"Been up to Bostin to buy goods; going to be a partner in the store first of September," he answered.

"Oh, won't that be nice?" she exclaimed, in glee. "You'll be able to keep a wife then, won't you?"

"Yas, when I get one," he said, a little doubtfully.

"Why, Jerry! what makes you talk like that?" she exclaimed, pouting just a little. "I'm sure that I intend to keep my promise and become your wife whenever you get ready to have me. Perhaps you never intend to get ready, though?"

"I'll squeeze you like all possessed if you say that ag'in!" he exclaimed, passing his strong arm around her slender waist. "I'm all ready whenever you are. But I say, Delie, what's the matter with your daddy? Folks say that he's all bust up."

"Well, father hasn't got much money," she said, slowly.

"What in thunder has he done with it?"

"Why, he never had much that really belonged to him," she explained.

"Oh, thunder! yes, I see now!" he said, understanding the facts of the case at once. "He was acting as agent for somebody else."

"Yes, that's something like it," she said.

"Of course father never said anything about it. He preferred to keep his business to himself."

"Yes, I see; and all the folks here thought that all the money belonged to him. I s'pose the old man's given up his agency, and that's the reason why you're back to the old quarters, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I guess you won't stop here very long, or else you'll have to make room for me somehow, 'cos I'm 'bout ready to get hitched, if you are."

"I ain't a horse!" she exclaimed.

"Wal, you know what I mean," he replied.

"Will you go to the picnic to-morrow, down to the Pool?"

"Yes; will you take me?"

"Sartin! Is the old man in?"

"Yes."

"Better get him to come, too; it will do him good."

And so, snugly side by side, his arm around her waist, the two proceeded to the house.

Hardly had the door closed behind them when two men, passing along the street in opposite directions, encountered each other face to face right in front of the gate.

An exclamation of surprise came from the lips of one, and an expression of terror from the other.

The two men were Jed Hollis, the carpenter, and Daisy Brick, the adventurer.

"Keep off!" cried Brick, in alarm, thrusting his hand in the side-pocket of the loose sack-coat which he wore. "I've got a revolver here, and if you attempt an attack, I'll drill a hole right through you."

"You cowardly hound!" cried Hollis, in disgust. "I ought to choke you a little; you deserve to be choked."

"You just keep your distance, now, or I'll give you a chance to take a ride without having to pay for it, you big overgrown bully!"

"See here; why can't you be reasonable?" Hollis asked.

"Reasonable?" Brick said, doubtfully.

"Yes, about that matter that we spoke about that night by the quarry; you remember that night?"

"I should rather say that I do remember that night," Brick replied, ruefully. The unceremonious manner in which he had been set down upon the jagged stone was yet fresh in his memory.

"Why can't you make a bargain, then? I heard enough of the conversation between you and this Miss Grame to know that you possess some secret concerning her. In some way she is in your power. Now, I want you to tell me all you know about her. I'll pay you well if you will."

"This is just what you said before. I gave you an answer then; what a difficult matter it is to satisfy you."

"I shall never be satisfied until I find out what I want to know," Hollis said, sulkily.

"You'll never be satisfied, my friend, then, as far as I am concerned," Brick said, firmly.

"You won't tell me?"

"No, I won't."

"Now jest you listen to me then!" Hollis exclaimed, threateningly. "I'll lay for you, and some dark night I'll catch you unawares, when you won't have your revolver handy, and I'll jest squeeze the life out of you."

Brick felt a cold shiver come over him at the threat.

"Now see here," he expostulated, "you'll get yourself in State Prison the first thing you know."

"But I'll have satisfaction out of you first," Hollis said, grimly.

"And because I won't tell you what I know about this woman?"

"Yes."

"You want to marry her, don't you?" Brick asked, suddenly.

"Yes."

"Well, you can't do it."

"What?" Hollis was astonished.

"I tell you you can't do it; she can't marry anybody."

"Why not?" the carpenter asked in wonder.

"Well, that's my secret."

"Then she can't marry Sin Paxton?"

"No; I tell you that she won't marry anybody."

"Well, that's some comfort," Hollis muttered.

"And now, the quicker you make up your mind to forget this girl, the better it will be for you."

"Oh, it's easy enough to say that."

"You might as well do it first as last."

"Ain't this a trick on your part to fool me?"

Hollis asked, suspiciously.

"What the deuce do I care about the matter?" Brick cried, impatiently: "I'm not in love with her. It does not matter to me whom she marries, but I tell you, first and last, she won't marry anybody."

"Go on; I won't trouble you."

Hollis stopped aside, and Brick passed on. The carpenter seemed like one stunned; slowly he proceeded up the street.

The adventurer walked rapidly away, chuckling to himself at his escape.

"The madman would have strangled me some dark night," he muttered, as he hastened onward.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PICNIC.

THE morning of July Fourth came bright and beautiful. As it was a holiday, and the mills were all closed, a picnic had been gotten up, and about eight o'clock it started for the shore.

All sorts and kinds of vehicles, from an omnibus down to a hay wagon, had been called into action, and a motley party, full of life and fun, drove down to the beach.

As it was low tide, some of the male members of the party, headed by Jerry Gardner, proceeded to dig for clams, it being the intention to have a mammoth clam-bake.

The head-quarters of the picnic had been fixed in a small grove of stunted pines, which afforded some little shelter from the sun.

Others of the party strolled up and down the beach. Lydia, who had been persuaded to join the picnic party by Mr. Gardner, although she wandered off by herself, and finding a secluded spot among the rocks, from which she could command a full view of the ocean, sat down, and gave herself up to reflections, which were rather sad than joyful.

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,

And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Lydia recognized the voice at once. She looked up in astonishment and beheld Sinclair Paxton standing on the rock just above her head.

She had been so occupied in her dreamy meditation that she had not heard him approach.

"Splendid, isn't it?" he cried joyously, springing down to her side. "You seem lost in meditation. The party are at luncheon; they missed you, and so I volunteered to go in search of you."

"I did not know that you were coming," the girl said, a heightened color in her cheeks; but she kept her eyes fixed upon the ground and avoided his gaze.

"Oh, I fully intended to come. I had some

letters to write this morning, and that detained me a little, so that I was not able to start with the rest. I drove down to where I keep my boat, and then came down in her. There she is now." And he pointed seaward. "See that sail-boat rounding the point of the island and standing in toward shore?"

"Yes," the girl answered, shading her eyes with her hand and gazing out to sea.

"That's the Pearl—that's my boat you know."

"You promised me once that you would take a sail with me. I shall call upon you to keep that promise before we go home to-night."

"No, no, I can not!" the girl cried, quickly.

"You cannot go?" he said, slowly; "why not?"

"Because, if I go with you, people will talk about it; even now they couple our names together. It is not right for them to do so. There is nothing in common between you and me, nor can there ever be; let us then go on our separate paths through the world without regard to each other."

"Lydia, why do you speak in this cruel way? Have I deserved it?"

"No, no!" she cried, quickly, and her voice trembled with emotion; "to me you have ever been kind and good. Do not blame me! It is fate that speaks when I say that in the future we must be as strangers to each other. We cannot be friends; that is impossible; it is too dangerous for both of us. We cannot be friends without being lovers."

"Is not this a sudden resolution?" he asked, in wonder, hardly able as yet to comprehend the full extent of the blow.

"Yes, I have struggled against it, but it must be."

"Lydia, you must take a sail with me this afternoon, for I have publicly said that you were going to do so. One of my friends wished the loan of the boat and I refused him, pleading a prior engagement with you. If you do not go, it will give rise to vastly more gossip than if you do go," he said, gravely.

"Well, I will go then. I will enjoy the pleasure of your company one little hour longer, and then we must say good-by." The eyes of the girl were wet with tears as she uttered the words.

"I trust that you will reconsider your determination."

She shook her head mournfully.

And just at that moment a party of three came over the rocks.

There was Jerry and Delia, hand in hand, and old Daddy Embden and Mrs. Gardner, bringing up the rear.

"Hullo! here they are, arter all!" Jerry exclaimed, as he beheld the two. "The folks thought that you were lost, Sinclair!"

"Oh, no," Paxton answered, pleasantly, no trace of the painful scene through which he had just passed upon his face.

Lydia rose to her feet, but there was a tinge of color in her cheeks and a trace of moisture about her eyes which did not escape the sharp look of Delia.

Lydia adjusted the straw hat—which she had held idly in her hand—upon her head and turned to go, when Daddy Embden, who had just clambered up the flat rock upon which the party were gathered, uttered a sharp cry of alarm, and went down on the rocks all in a heap.

"He's got a fit!" Jerry yelled.

The little party clustered around the old man in great alarm. A moment's examination, though, convinced them that there was but little cause for alarm. The old captain had only fainted.

They loosened his necktie and splashed seawater in his face, and in a minute or two he began to revive.

"Father hasn't been well lately," Delia explained.

"The tramp in the hot sun has been too much for the old man," Jerry whispered to Sinclair.

"He's gittin' better," Mrs. Gardner said.

Slowly the old man opened his eyes and looked into Lydia's face, bent down over him.

"Be you alive?" he asked, faintly and mysteriously.

"He don't know what he's sayin'," Mrs. Gardner said, confidently.

"This is Miss Grame, father," Delia explained.

"Grame! Grame!" he muttered, evidently in doubt.

"Yes; do you feel better now?" Lydia asked.

"Oh, yes, I'm better," he replied, slowly, his mind evidently in a fog.

Then the two men assisted him to his feet. The old sailor was fast becoming himself again.

"Did you hurt yourself, father, when you fell?" the daughter asked.

"No—no," the old man replied, dubiously, as if he wasn't exactly sure of the fact.

The little party took their way back to the grove. Old Embden, though he had fully recovered his strength, seemed greatly puzzled at something, and kept muttering slowly to himself as he walked along.

After the clam-bake had been served up and discussed, the party broke up into some dozen or so little groups, each bent on some particular amusement, while Sinclair and Lydia got into the sail-boat and drifted slowly out to sea.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT LAST.

THE breeze was but a gentle zephyr, scarcely stirring the surface of the water, and the little sail-boat which held Paxton and Lydia made but slow progress.

The tide, too, being on the flood, was against them, a fact which Sinclair noticed and remarked upon.

"We shall have to beat up against an ebb-tide when we return," he said. And looking at his watch, he was astonished to discover that it was after five.

"The afternoon has passed very rapidly," he remarked.

"Yes," Lydia answered, vacantly, gazing wistfully out upon the broad ocean.

"Lydia, now I am going to speak very plainly to you, and I hope you will be equally frank in return," he said, suddenly.

"I will try to be so," she replied, keeping her now pale face averted from him, and dipping her hand carelessly in the water, that was surging past the side of the boat.

"Well, tell me *why* we must be as strangers to each other?"

"Have I not already told you?" she responded, with tremulous accent.

"Tell me over again, then," he said, quietly.

"I wish to be sure that I really know your reasons."

"Can you not spare me this task?" she asked, imploringly; "it is very painful."

"Not more painful for you to speak than for me to listen," he replied, firmly. "You yourself have said that this is to be our last meeting. Your will is law to me. Whatever you wish, shall be. I have but one request to make to you."

"And what is that?" she demanded, in wonder, for the first time turning her eyes upon him.

"I love you; give me a remedy for that love."

"Why, how can I?"

"Tell me the *reasons* why you say that we must be as strangers to each other, and perhaps one of them may be the remedy," he replied, very quietly; but there was a something in his voice which grated unpleasantly upon her ears; it seemed like an accusation.

"Since you force me to speak, listen, then," she said, speaking with a coolness which she was far from feeling. "Your station in life and mine are widely apart. You are rich, and I am poor. Should I marry you, I should always feel that I am under an obligation to you."

"That is reason No. 1?"

"Yes."

"Now I'll answer it." He took his pocket-book from his breast-pocket and opened it; from it he took a check. "See, Lydia," he said, "there is my last month's salary, with the exception of a dollar or two in my pocket. It is all the money I have about me. In a second I will be for the moment as poor as you, for thus I tear the check up and throw it into the sea."

Deliberately he tore the check in half, but Lydia bending forward, caught his arm and looked reproachfully in his face.

"Oh, Sinclair, it is wicked to do that!" she cried.

"To destroy this money?"

"Yes."

"Why? Of what use is money, except to buy things with? To the shipwrecked sailor, cast away on some desert island, in the far-off southern ocean, gold is as worthless as the sand beneath his feet. If by destroying my wealth I can purchase you, whom I prized as the wrecked seaman would the sight of the little sail which promises rescue and home, to what better use can I put my money?"

"I can not answer you," the girl said, and again she laved her hand in the green waters bubbling past the boat.

"Well, your second reason?" and he crumpled

the torn cloth up and thrust it into his pocket.

"I do not think that I am worthy to be your wife!" The words came with effort from her lips, and her bosom heaved with strong emotion.

"But *why* are you not?—give me a reason. What have you ever done?"

"I can not tell you," she murmured, lowly, and the hot face was covered by the little hands.

"Lydia, if there was a reason, I think you could tell me," he said, slowly.

There was a long, painful silence. The sun came nearer and nearer to the horizon line; the little white cloud afar off in the north-east grew larger and larger; and on the broad ocean, a mile or so beyond the headland of Wood Island, the white-crested billows began to roll and toss like jolly monsters of the deep.

"Well, have you finished?" he asked, finding that she did not speak.

"No," she said, and the usually soft and gentle voice was hoarse and strained; "there is another reason."

"Say it."

"I do not love you."

The two mortals within that little sail-boat, who sat staring at each other with white faces, seemed more like statues carved out of marble, than humans hot with the breath of life.

"You—do not—love me?" he said, slowly, and the lips that spoke were colorless, and the eyes that looked the question, fixed and glaring.

The girl could not speak. Vainly she attempted to reply, but though the lips moved, no sound came from them; a moment or so the breath came in gasps from between the white lips, and then, with a sigh, she sunk down in the bottom of the boat.

She had fainted.

Forgotten now were all her cruel words; forgotten now was the white squall coming so rapidly on, the wind lashing the quiet waves into white-capped monsters of destruction.

Paxton thought only of the fair young girl whom he loved better than he did his own life, and who lay senseless upon the bottom of the boat.

Quickly he sprung to her, and lifted the helpless form in his arms.

The moment he quitted the tiller, the boat swung round, and the squall struck her.

Snap went the mast close to the deck, and canvas and broken wood came down upon the lovers.

The boat shipped a heavy sea, then righted; 'twas but a wreck now, though, drifting away at the mercy of the wind and wave.

"The Pearl" was an excellent sea boat, and the sudden breakage of the mast had saved her from a capsizing. The first fury of the blow had been the worst; and even now the wind seemed shorn of half its strength.

The heavy sea that had poured into the boat had almost drenched the lovers from head to foot.

One good effect it had produced, though, it had revived the girl from her faint.

"What has happened?" she asked, as she looked around and saw the wreck. She was held tightly to Sinclair's breast, and she made no effort to free herself.

"A sudden gust of wind snapped the mast, and we are drifting out to sea," he answered.

"Are we in danger, then?"

"Yes."

"And we may both die here on the ocean together?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then, since death is near, I take back the falsehood that my lips uttered but a moment since. I do love you! love you better than any thing else in all the wide world! You are my king—my life; and I can die here happy on your breast, feeling but your kisses pressed upon my lips!" she cried passionately.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STORY OF HER LIFE.

A MOMENT Sinclair looked into the face, now flushed with passionate love, saw the humid eyes and the full lips, red as the carnation flower; then, with a long, lingering kiss, he claimed the loving woman as his own for all time to come.

"You love me?" he murmured.

"Yes—yes—as I have never loved any one else, as I shall never love again. I have struggled vainly against it, but it is more powerful than I, and I will not resist my fate. In spite of the guilt which will cling to the action, in spite of everything in this world, whether we live or die, I am yours until eternity." Her

arms were clasped around his neck, and her head resting on his shoulder.

Little recked either that they had been drenched by the sea-wave almost to the skin, and that the wet clothing was clinging around them.

"You have something to tell me, have you not?" he asked.

"Yes; before I have always feared that you would despise and hate me when you knew of my past life; but now your kisses have told me that, no matter what I have done, your love will not falter."

"No, believe that!" he cried, fervently.

Then for the first time he took his eyes from the girl he held within his arms and looked around him. The night was coming on rapidly; already the gloom was descending upon the waters. Wood Island light, shining brightly some two miles to the south-west, showed how far they had drifted with the tide.

"I must see if I can rig a sail in some way, and then we can beat back to the harbor," he said.

He instructed Lydia how to manage the tiller, while he proceeded to clear away the wreck. Within half an hour he had, by aid of an oar, rigged a sail, and once more the Pearl was gliding over the water, beating up outside of Stratton's Islands.

"It will be dark before we reach the shore at this rate," he said, resuming his seat at her side.

"The good folks of the twin cities would have plenty to talk about, but the prompt announcement of our engagement will be quite apt to stop their mouths."

"Now, must I tell you all?" she asked, nestling down by his side.

"Yes, all."

"Give me your hand, then; I shall feel more confident feeling the pressure of your touch."

He passed his arm around her waist and drew her up to him.

"Go on; you are comfortable now?"

"Yes." Then she began her story. "I am a Virginian, born in the town of Staunton, up in the mountains. My father was quite wealthy, and I was an only child. When the war broke out I was twelve years old. My father was called to Richmond and became one of the chief officers of the Government. When I was about fifteen years old, father introduced me into society, and I saw a great deal of company; nearly all were officers of the army stationed in Richmond or with Lee's army on the Potomac. One officer in particular, a colonel of a Georgia regiment, paid me a great deal of attention, but he was an ugly, brutal-looking man, and I really hated him. There was a young Englishman, too, one of the secretaries of my father's department, who professed a great attachment for me. I say he was an Englishman, for such he professed to be, but afterward I discovered that he was a renegade Northerner—an adventurer without principle or honor.

"A few days after my sixteenth birthday the colonel made me a formal offer. I refused him, and when he went to my father, he said that I was but a child and that five years hence would be time enough for him to be looking for a son-in-law.

"Then came the dark days of the rebellion; troops were hurried forward to the front, and reports came back of bloody conflicts and that the Yankee soldiers were coming nearer and nearer. My father, too, became involved in a quarrel with one of the Government officers higher in rank than himself. He never told me, but I think it was the President himself. Satisfied that the Southern cause was hopeless, he made preparations to fly to the North, and then to Europe. I was left in charge of the secretary, and we were to go to New York as soon as we could get through the lines, and there join my father. He kissed me one night, bid me good-by, and I never saw him again.

"The secretary came to see me regularly every day, but said that he could neither gain any intelligence of my father or arrive at any plan by which we could escape to the North.

"At last, just one week after my father went away, the secretary came one morning, said that he had heard from my father, and that we must leave for the North that night.

"When the night came, we set out. He took me to a house in a narrow street, where he said we would get disguises. But when we entered the house, I found that the Georgia colonel was there. I suspected on the instant that I had been deceived. Then the young man said that he had received instructions from my father that I was to marry the colonel, as he had been obliged to fly to Europe, and could no longer protect me.

I knew that it was all false. The secretary had been bribed by the soldier to lure me into his power. But I was alone and helpless. A minister came into the room, and without paying any attention to my remonstrances, married me to Colonel Melledge. Then they left me to my despair, the colonel locking the door behind him, but saying that he would soon return. I was desperate. In my bosom I had concealed a little revolver which my father had given me, some time before. He had said that in war days even women sometimes needed weapons. He had also given me five hundred dollars in gold and greenbacks when he left me.

"I took the revolver from my bosom, and all the old Indian blood of the Randolphs of Roanoke—I am of that family—rose in my veins.

"When the colonel entered the room and attempted to take me in his arms, I shot him, just as if he had been a wild beast. Then I fled into the open air. I turned from the narrow street into a broad one. The bells suddenly commenced to ring and the people came rushing through the street, exclaiming that the Yankee troops had entered the city. And so they had. Richmond had fallen! I never shall forget that night; the negroes seemed mad with joy.

"I made my way as soon as I could to New York, but I could not discover any traces of my father there. And one day, as I was walking through the streets, I came face to face with the secretary who had sold me to Melledge. He told me that Melledge was in the city and had been in search of me. I implored him not to betray me. He consented on one condition, and that was that I should go with him. I consented, for I knew that the only way to escape from him was to deceive him. I gave him a false address and promised to wait for him at my house. The moment he left me, I walked on I knew not where, until I found myself at a railroad depot. A train was just starting for Boston. I got on board and came to that city. I procured an obscure lodging, and gave a false name, and strove to hide myself from all the world. I got sewing to do, and so I lived a weary, aimless life, until this last winter I fell sick; it was a sort of a slow fever, and one day as I sat in my little room vainly trying to sew, the door opened and the secretary walked into the room. In a cold, cruel voice he told me that now he had found me, I must choose between him and my husband, who, he said was in the city searching for me. Again I deceived him, and he, thinking that I was too sick to attempt to escape, left me for the purpose of calling a coach to take me away. But, weak as I was, I staggered into the street. It was just getting dark, and snowing furiously. I did not go far; I had only one wish, to die; and so in a dark corner I lay down in that snow-bank, hoping to find the rest that had been denied me."

"But you were saved?"

"Yes; that good old colored woman, aunty Dinah, dragged me from the snow and brought me down here, and here, for the first time since my father's disappearance, I have known what it is to be happy."

"And this secretary has not discovered you here?"

"Oh, yes, he has; he calls himself Daisy Brick now. But he has not threatened me as usual. He only demanded money, which I gave him, but he has not said a word about my husband."

"Your husband, you poor girl!" he said, compassionately. "Such a marriage as you have described amounts to nothing. This fellow has played upon your weakness. The chances are ten to one that the soldier is dead."

"And can you love me—a murderess?" she asked, fearfully.

"No, not that, but the brave girl who dared to protect her honor from a villain. Don't fear! All is bright in the future. The barriers between us are but the paper forts of the Chinese; a puff of wind and they are gone. And, as for Daisy Brick, leave him to me. I warrant that I'll find some way to get the truth out of the fellow."

The white squall was over, and peace had come at last.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RESTITUTION.

OF course the gossips of the twin cities had not let their tongues remain idle when they heard how Sinclair Paxton and Lydia Grame had sailed out into Saco Bay, at five o'clock, and had not returned until near ten, and they turned up their noses when they spoke of the accident which had befallen the boat.

"Oh, no!" they cried, significantly: "Sin Pax-

ton's too good a sailor to be caught napping by a little capful of wind!" And so for two whole days poor Lydia's character suffered, but on the morning of the third day the scandalous allusions ceased, and wondering amazement set in when the newspapers announced that "Mr. Sinclair Paxton, our esteemed fellow-citizen and Treasurer of the Y— Mills, would shortly be united in marriage with the young and accomplished Miss Lydia Grame Dallis."

Daisy Brick read the announcement while waiting for his turn in the barber's shop, and the news interested him so greatly that he at once started out to interview the prospective bridegroom.

He found Paxton at his office in the mill.

He opened fire at once. Daisy had calculated that Paxton would come down pretty heavily. In fact, he had made up his mind to "strike" him for a heavy "stake."

Briefly, and with graceful coolness, he "went for" his intended victim.

"You are about to marry Miss Grame—or, Miss Dallis, to speak more properly?" he said.

"What's that to you, sir?" Paxton said, sharply.

Daisy saw that it was necessary to strike a down blow.

"I have information, sir, which will probably prevent your marriage, if I choose to make it public."

"You are Mr. Brick?"

"Yes, sir."

Daisy was rather astonished at being known.

"Formerly secretary to Glyn Dallis of Virginia?"

"Yes—yes, sir."

Daisy began to feel a little uncomfortable.

"Who assisted Colonel Melledge of Georgia in a most scandalous outrage, and by means of which the said colonel met his death?"

The ground had been cut from under the feet of the adventurer, and he couldn't utter a word.

Paxton saw at once that he had guessed the truth. He was quick to follow up his advantage.

"Now, sir, take my advice and get out of Biddeford. Confidence rascals of your stamp are not wanted in our community."

Brick looked at Paxton, blankly, for a moment; then turned upon his heel and left the office.

The adventurer was seen no more in Biddeford.

It was on that very same afternoon that Nathan drove old Daddy Embden over to Deacon Paxton's.

"I want to see you on a leetle matter of business," the old man cried, as the deacon appeared at the front door, and Peleg got out quite nimbly.

"Come right in, Peleg," the deacon said.

"What is it?"

The two sat down in the parlor.

"Wal, furst an' foremost, is it true that your son, Sinclair, is going to marry that gal Liddy, as the paper says?"

"Yes, I believe that the report is true."

"Kinder sudden, ain't it?"

"Well, no; there's been a little love affair going on for some time, I think."

"Delie says she's a putty nice gal."

"Yes; I've no objections to the match, al though she is a poor girl."

"Who?"

"Why, this Miss Lydia," said the deacon, rather astonished at the question.

"She ain't poor!"

"No?"

"Got eighty-one thousand dollars, an' proper legal interest on that for seven years."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed the deacon, betrayed into uttering an exclamation which savored more of the world than of the church.

"Fact, I've had the keer of her property ever since May, 1865. I've brought the documents all over with me, an' I want you to hold me to a proper account. There was jest eighty-one thousand dollars, and then the regular legal interest since 1865."

"But how did this money come in your hands?" Paxton asked, in astonishment.

"Wal, it's a long story, deacon," the old man replied, in some little confusion. "But the short of it is that her daddy intrusted it to me, an' then he got killed, an' I didn't know where the gal was, an'—Wal, in course, it don't matter much. I've got the money, an' I want you to hold me right down to a strictly proper account, with legal interest." Then the old man took a large bundle of papers from his pocket. "There's the hull thing figured out. Delie did

it, an' I guess she's got it all straight, but if it ain't, I'll make it straight!"

"Whatever you may have done, Peleg, I guess that you're all right in the future," the deacon said, kindly.

"That's gospel truth, deacon!" the old man said, solemnly. "I've heered in my time a sight of men who were powerful good in hollering for the gospel, but they ain't got it in their inwards like you have. Say, deacon, I've got a question to put to you 'bout this money. You know I've had it a putty long time, an' I've rally made more than proper legal interest out of it, say about eight or ten thousand dollars over; who does that belong to? I ain't very young, now, deacon, an' I can't go back an' begin over ag'in; then, I got my darter, too, Delie; she's got the right religion, too; she 'rasted with me when I was weak. She ain't very strong, an' these pesky sewing-machines are enough to kill a jackass, let alone the women folks."

"All over and above the eighty-one thousand dollars, and the legal interest thereof, belongs to you, Peleg; you can keep it with a clear conscience. The steward is worthy of his hire. But, in regard to the papers, come to-night, when Sinclair will be home, and we'll run over them together."

"Much obliged, deacon," and the old man rose to depart.

"Not at all; you are heartily welcome, Peleg."

"Say, deacon!" cried the old man, suddenly, pausing in the doorway, "didn't you tell me once that you didn't believe in ghosts?"

"Well, I don't remember whether I ever told you so or not, but I certainly do not believe in them," the deacon answered.

"You're right, deacon, by hooky; there ain't any such things."

Then Embden climbed into the buggy, and Nathan drove off.

As the buggy ascended the hill, on the Biddeford side, Embden suddenly addressed the driver.

"Say, Nathan, do you remember the night when you drove me along here an' I thought I see'd a ghost?"

"Wal, I calculate I do," Nathan replied. "I thought you was goin' clean ravin' distracted."

"You didn't see anything, did you?"

"No, I guess not; only a couple of the mill girls a-talkin' down at the corner of the street."

"One on 'em had on a straw hat an' a waterproof cloak?"

"Yes."

"Miss Liddy that's goin' to marry Sin Paxton?"

"Wal, now that you speak of it, I guess it was." Nathan couldn't understand what the old man was driving at.

"That's my ghost," and Embden chuckled in great glee. "I used to know her father; he's dead an' gone now, an' I had no idee that either kith nor kin of his was 'round these parts. He used to wear a leetle straw hat, jest like the one she wears, an' in the dark, with that cloak wrapped around her, she looked jest like him. Tell you what, Nathan, I don't believe in spirits nohow."

Hollis swore outright that he wouldn't stay in Biddeford to see the woman he loved married to the man he hated; so up to Boston he went, and in a drunken fit shipped for a three years' voyage in a whaler, bound for the South Pacific.

The wedding Sunday came at last, and two couples went into the church single and came out married. Delia Embden became Mrs. Gardner, and Lydia Dallis, Mrs. Sinclair Paxton.

As they came from the church, a sudden thought occurred to Sinclair.

"That ivory picture?" he said.

"My father's portrait," she replied; "I did all I could to shake your faith, but it was firm as the rock."

"And the Saco's curse?" the deacon asked, as they sat in the parlor after tea.

"Has passed away," Sinclair replied; "the Indian blood has come again into the family. Lydia is a descendant of Randolph of Roanoke, the blood of Pocahontas is in her veins."

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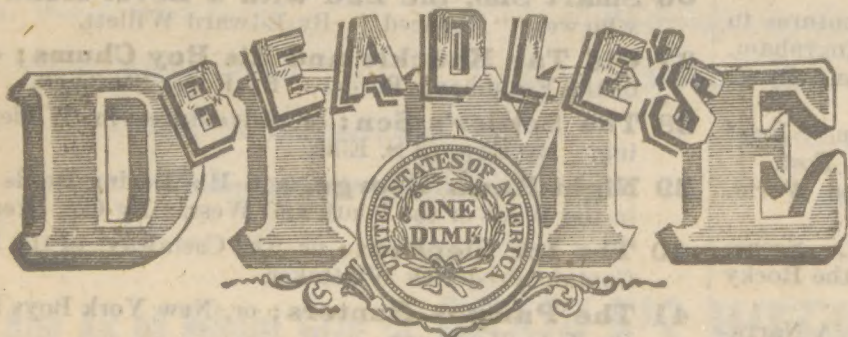


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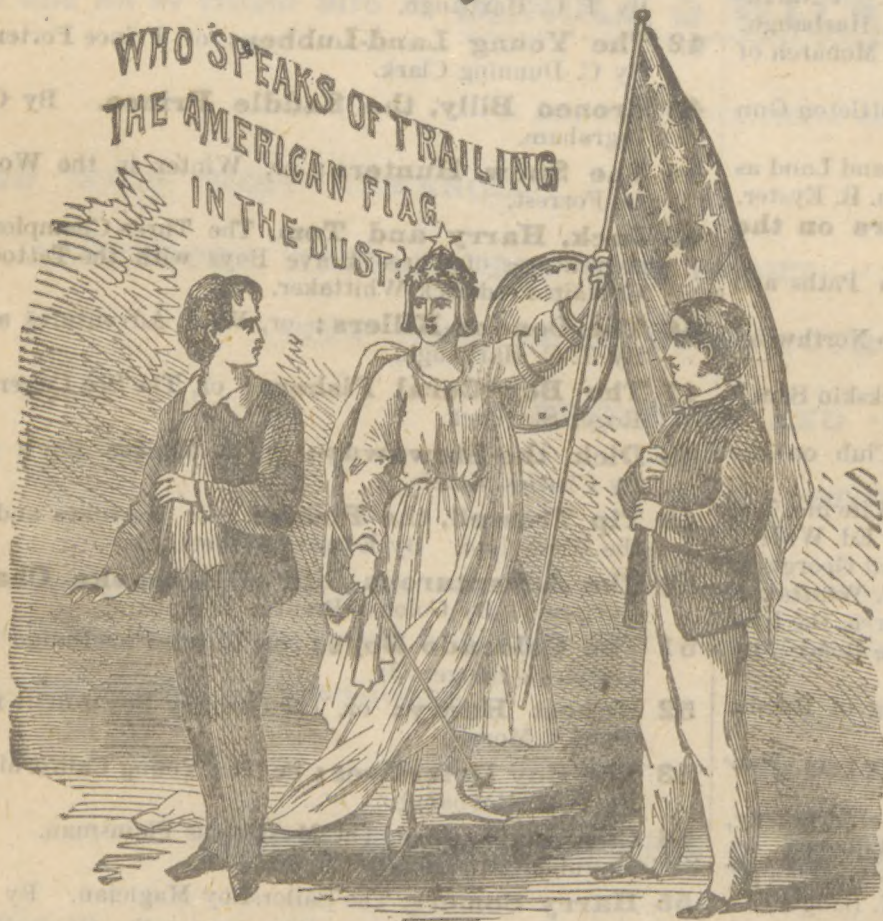
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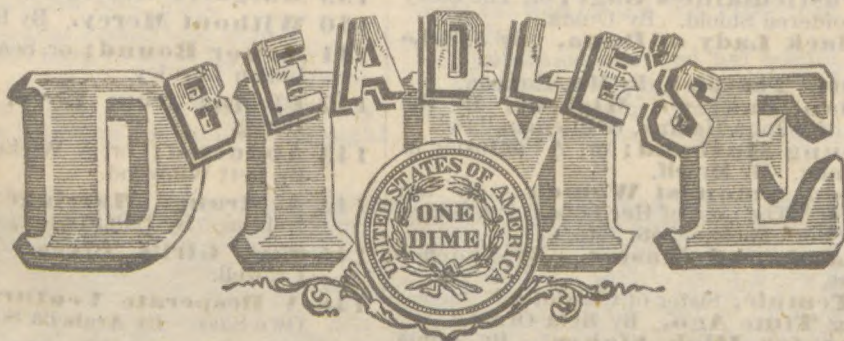
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